Academy of the Mystical Knights

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1. Chapter 1

Soul Eater/Elemnetal Gelade fantasy AU. Depending on the overall reactions i may or may not continue

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><p>Becoming Knights

The Kingdom of Valera. A prospering country defended by it's many magically inclined knights and their partners. The magical Knights of this kingdom come from all walks of life, as anyone, even those not noble born are capable of selfless acts of courage and heroism. The only real requirement to become a Knight is to find yourself a partner.

An Implement.

Hundreds of years ago a great darkness nearly enveloped the world. Even the greatest wizards and knights of the day were powerless to stop it. Even their combined magical knowledge and combat prowess proved futile until one day they found a way to take combine their efforts and take their power to the next level.

Thus a magician of great power used his knowledge to shed his physical form and transform himself into a magical weapon of great power. The first Implement. With his magic manifested in a physical form and in the hands of the powerful knight they led the way for others to follow. With the combined powers of the wizards and knights they defeated the darkness.

_And since that day knights and wizards have continued to work together, pairing up to become newer generations of magical knights.

And in the Kingdom of Valera there's a special place where these knights are trained._

And that very place is where the heroes of this tale will unite to defend the world.

For unbeknownst to all but a few...a new darkness is coming.

* * *

><p>On the wide grassy fields of Valera there was a dirt road. And walking this road were two girls. One had a mane of fiery red curls, sporting a green dress with a skirt that fell down just past her knees, and dark boots. The other girl had long blonde hair with a short pink dress with pink flats. One their backs were their packs, and they'd been travelling a long time.<p>

The red head led the way, like she always did, while the blonde followed behind with a smile. The pair were friends, and partners. They'd been travelling together by themselves for some time. The redhead was a run away, where she was from only the blonde knew. And the blonde had lived her whole life in a tower until her friend had come along and found her, and since that day they'd been inseparable, traveling together before settling on a goal of becoming knights.

The blonde was an Implement, a person with high a high level of magic capable of taking on the form of a magical weapon. And the redhead was her partner and wielder.

"Och, I hate walking," the red head said out of the blue to break the monotony of the trip.

The blonde chuckled behind her. "Well at least we're almost there right?" she said to try and cheer her up.

"By almost there do you mean miles away?" the redhead said sarcastically as she stared at the distant city ahead of them that was slowly getting larger the closer they got.

"Oh c'mon Merida. Just enjoy this beautiful day," the blonde said cheerfully as she spun in a circle. She looked up at the sky with grass green eyes and a smile. She'd never get tired of walking, of being free to go anywhere she chose, to explore the wide open world with no walls to hold her back.

"We can't all be glass half full types Rapunzel," Merida said with a frown.

Rapunzel only giggled before taking a breath. "_Just smell the grass, the dirt, just like I'd dreamed they'd be-"_

"Not a damn song!" Merida interrupted as she scowled.

"_Just feel that summer breeze, the way it's calling me-"_

_"_Stop it," Merida said sourly. The blonde did not comply as she kept singing her joy, twirling and spinning behind the red head merrily as she just enjoyed the simple things life had to offer. Merida held her frown before glancing over her shoulder at her

friend, she couldn't help but smile as the blonde's sunny disposition made her bad mood dissipate.

She just rolled her eyes and kept her eyes ahead, to their future.

* * *

><p>Merida and Rapunzel gaped, turning their head to and fro as they took in the large city. They were in the capital, the home of the magical Knight academy. And of all the cities they'd traveled through on their way there this city was by far the biggest. People came and went about their business, there were shops all around. Food vendors, performers, clothing stores with pretty dresses. Rapunzel smiled wide and hopped in excitement as she looked around for something to do first.<p>

But before she could go off her arm was firmly grabbed. She looked to see Merida staring sternly at her.

"Oh no you don't lass. Business first," Merida reminded her. Rapunzel pouted and made puppy dog eyes at her, something that usually worked, but not this time. "I promise we'll see the city after...ok?" Merida offered. With a sigh Rapunzel nodded, following Merida as they headed toward the academy just on the outskirts of the city.

They followed a long road through a forest, their goal finally in sight. Eventually they made it to the gates, only to be halted by knights and their partners. They asked what business they had there, but Merida quickly pulled out her secret weapon.

A letter she'd received by one of the staff of the academy. She and Rapunzel had run into her during their travels and she'd seen what they could do and recommended they join the academy. She'd even written them up a letter of recommendation so they'd be allowed in.

The guards let them past, allowing them to finally step foot in what they hoped would be their future homes for the next few years. They walked the halls, passing students who gave them curious looks as they went.

"Hey Mer?" Rapunzel asked. Merida glanced back. "Where are we going?"

"To see the headmaster of course," Merida answered.

"And where exactly do we go to see him?"

"Well that's simple we go," Merida paused mid sentence, just now realizing she had no idea where the head master's office would be. "Uh..." she began to flush in embarrassment as Rapunzel stared at her, blinking as she awaited her answer. Her awkward pause was ended as something suddenly landed on her head.

"Bloody-" Merida cursed as she nearly toppled over. "What's on my head?" she asked her partner.

Rapunzel's jaw was hanging low as she took in the small black creature with wings nestling on Merida's head. "It's a dragon," she said in astonishment. "And it's so cute," Rapunzel cooed. The dragon

stared at her with green eyes and seemed to even offer her a smile in greeting.

"Get off of me ya wee devil," Merida shouted as she shook her head and swiped at it with her hands. The dragon hovered in mid air before flying toward Rapunzel. It gave Merida a hiss as it settled on her shoulder like some kind of scaly cat.

"Aww. He's adorable," Rapunzel crooned as she gave it a scratch under the chin. The tiny dragon purred as he nuzzled against her cheek. Merida shook her head, but was admittedly amazed by the small thing. Dragons were a rare sight, and they weren't supposed to be native to this region.

"What's he doing this far south. They're supposed to live far up north aren't they?" she asked aloud.

"He's being a pest," someone answered for her. Rapunzel and Merida turned their attention as a boy approached. He looked to be about their age and was quite tall. He had shaggy auburn hair, with several strands tied into braids at the back. He wore a black blazer that they assumed meant he was a student/

"Come here Toothless, stop bothering people. We got class," the man said. The dragon warbled at him before leaping off Rapunzel and flying over to perch on his shoulder. The man smiled as he rubbed it's head before he looked to the girls. "Huh? Don't think I've seen you two before. And you're not wearing the uniform. New students?"

"Yeah. And we're kind of lost," Rapunzel admitted sheepishly.

"We are not lost," Merida said defiantly as she placed her hands on her hips. They were. But her pride wouldn't let her blatantly admit it to a stranger.

"Well ok then. Headmaster's office is that way. But you already knew that so-" he trailed off with a shrug. "Bye," he said as he turned on his heel and walked away.

The girls stared after him curiously, having never caught his name.

"He has a dragon. Interesting," Merida hummed.

"I heard some creatures can be Implements too. Maybe that's his partner?" Rapunzel suggested. Merida pursed her lips in thought and shrugged. Together they followed the man's directions and eventually found themselves in the headmaster's office.

The headmaster, North he called himself, greeted them with a hearty laugh and friendly smile. He welcomed them to the academy, having been expecting their arrival for some time.

"You girls have travelled a long way, yes. Perhaps a day to rest would be for the best," he said in a thick foreign accent.

"If it's all the same with you headmaster. We'd prefer to just jump right in. Right Punz?" Merida said to the blonde. Rapunzel nodded in agreement.

North laughed, belly shaking as he slapped a hand down on the table. "I like you two already. Ok. But take the rest of the day to get settled. I'll have someone show you to your rooms," he said. He stared at them, eyes twinkling as he assessed them.

"I've heard good things about you two. I'm sure you'll be quite the _wonder _to see," he said lowly. They flushed awkwardly as a new student arrived. A strawberry blonde girl greeted them, introducing herself as Anna. She ushered them along to the girl's dormitory and to their rooms. She waited as they set down their things before leading them to the mess hall so they could eat.

The cafeteria was large, students bustled about, sitting at various table in their little groups, talking, laughing, and chatting away about various things.

After collecting their food Anna led them to a table and sat with them. She asked about them, and the girls gave her a pre rehearsed tale of their lives and how they'd met. Anna didn't seem to catch their lies as she accepted them with a nod. She introduced herself, stating she was a second year of the Knight's program. She stated that she, like Rapunzel, was an Implement.

The girls perked up, curious as to what her weapon form was and where her partner was. Anna seemed to want to keep it a secret for now, so they didn't push her for answers.

After their meal Anna gave them a brief tour of the academy, showing them the most important locations for them and some of the places meant for leisure. She explained how class worked, and how they students were judged on their skills.

Eventually she led them back to their room, where they found their class schedules under their door alongside uniforms resting on their beds. Rapunzel smiled while Merida frowned as she took in the skirt she was going to have to wear. She hated skirts.

They got in a wash and then went to bed, all nerves and fluttering hearts. They were finally here.

* * *

><p>"Oh you guys look great," Anna said with a smile a she clapped at the sight of them. Rapunzel beamed and did a twirl while Merida fidgeted and blushed. She really didn't like skirts. She had a black blazer with a white undershirt with a red knee length skirt. She sighed and shrugged. There was nothing she could do about.<p>

Anna led them to class, she told them how they were taught things like politics, math, language, history and mythology, along with courses more suited to making them knights like magic studies and combat.

The day went about in relative peace and quiet. Which to Merida and Rapunzel meant it was a tad boring. They were used to traveling, wandering the kingdom as they fought evil creature and saved the day. But they endured. As they were in class Merida glanced around, taking in the sight of her classmates before her eyes landed on the boy they'd met the other day. The dragon was curled up on the table top

before him, napping as his master dutifully took notes.

She looked around some more, finding more dragons with several of her classmates. After class she asked Anna about them. She stated that the people with dragons were from far north, and that their dragons were their Implements.

"Be careful with them. They're all pretty tough. All of them are B-rank and above," Anna told them.

"B-rank huh?" Merida said curiously. That meant they were pretty tough.

The students were judged and ranked according to their skills in magic and combat. The ranks were from E, the lowest, to A, the highest. As she thought about this Merida couldn't help but be curious as to what her and Rapunzel's ranks were. She asked Anna.

"You have your Speculum right?"

Merida and Rapunzel nodded as they pulled out their Speculums. Tiny magical mirrors that allowed them to communicate with each other and other students and provided them with info on each other. Merida thought of herself as she stared at the mirror, prompting it to pull up information on herself.

She found it. And she was not happy.

"D-rank!" Merida cried indignantly. She looked to Anna, grabbing the girl's shoulders in outrage. "How the heck am I a D-rank!?"

"Well you're new, so they don't have much on you. The more they know about you the more accurately they'll be able to judge and rank you according to your skills," Anna explained quickly.

"So they need to see what we can do huh?" Merida muttered. She smirked, mind forming a plan. Ever more curious her eyes flicked to the man with the black dragon, she held him in her mind. The mirror pulled up his profile. "Rank E."

Anna leaned over. "Oh yeah. That's Hiccup, the only E-rank in the entire school," Anna explained.

"Is he that bad?"

"Academically speaking, no. He scores the highest in the entire school. But the problem is he always forfeits every time he gets challenged. No one has ever seen him fight at all."

Merida hummed in thought before dismissing the man as a coward. Finally combat and gym class arrived. The girls and boys were led outside to a large open courtyard where they could exercise and practise their magic and combat skills. The instructor before them was a tall man with dark hair and swirling tattoos. He called himself Aster, and as an instructor he was a full fledged Knight of Valera.

He scanned the students over, taking role before he stopped on Merida and Rapunzel.

"Ah. New students I see. Welcome to the Academy girls,"he greeted. The girls nodded and smiled at him and greeting. "Hmm. How about we see you two in action huh?" He gestured them over to a large empty square so they could show use their powers.

The girls took a few breaths and stretched to loosen up. They stood side by side, Merida glanced at her partner, noting her nervous posture.

"Nervous?" she asked her.

Rapunzel swallowed and nodded, glancing over at their classmates. "Stage fright," she whispered.

"Whenever you sheilas are ready!" Aster called out.

"Just a sec," Merida called back. She placed a hand on Rapunzel's. "It alright Punz. Just focus on me, aye?" Rapunzel nodded and smiled at her encouragement. She took a breath and closed her eyes.

She reached within herself, feeling the magic within her. She tapped into it, letting it flow through her body. Like always there was an all around pain as her magic began to convert her physical form into an ethereal, matterless one. Her body glowed, blinding everyone in the courtyard with a golden light.

Everyone covered their eyes and gasped as a pillar of light shot into the air before arching downward. Merida remained on the spot as the beam of light descended on her. At the last second she raised a hand up. The light collided with her palm before, glowing and emitting light as it began to retake a new solid shape.

Finally the glow receded, revealing a smiling Merida holding a bow that looked to be made of pure gold. Merida looked to Aster to see what he thought.

The Knight nodded, impressed before clapping in approval. Some of the other student joined in, clapping in wonder.

"A bow. Rare sight among Knights," Aster commented as he examined it.

"I've always been more of a bow lass myself. So it must have been fate that Rapunzel and I found each other," Merida said fondly as she eyed her partner.

'_Aw. I'm happy I found you too Mer_,' Merida heard her partner say in her mind. When in their weapon form Knight and Implement communicated telepathically.

"So do you have a name for it...her?" Aster asked. Most Knight and Implements named their weapon forms.

"Apollo," Merida said with a smile. Fitting in her opinion.

"Lame!"

Merida turned her sharp eyes to the group of students. Her eyes

landed on a short stocky boy with brown hair. His face was blank and he was rolling his eyes.

"A bow? Long range weapons are for cowards," he said haughtily. A small red and orange dragon crawled up onto his shoulders. "Real Knight use swords, hammers, or maces. How like a gir-" he was cut off as a flash of gold flew by the side of his face. He was frozen on the spot, eyes shifting over to see a few strands of hair falling to the ground, the ends singed.

"Wanna test us then lad? You and your scaly friend?" Merida challenged. The other students all murmured to themselves in anxiousness. Was there about to be a duel?

"Well Snotlout? You going to accept the challenge?" Aster asked the teen.

The teen, Snotlout, narrowed his eyes as he pushed his way to the front.

"I will. And I'll wipe the floor with her too!" he declared.

Merida smiled in excitement while Rapunzel sighed in her mind.

_'I'm not sure about this Mer. Anna said he'd a B-rank,' _she heard Rapunzel say nervously.

"C'mon Punz. We can do this. It's time to show these people what we can do," Merida said confidently. "Besides," Merida added as she looked up to the sky, she saw the sun, nearing its apex. _Time is on our side._

It was time to make their debut, and this cocky Snotface was going to be the first stepping stone as they aimed for the top.

* * *

><p>new story. Depending on the overal first impressions and reviews I may continue or delete it.

2. Chapter 2

Competition

The whole courtyard was buzzing with excitement as the students were eagerly awaiting the first duel they'd seen in a long while. Aster had both Merida and Snotlout step into the fighting arena, and once in place he activated the magic barrier around it meant to contain magic and avoid damage to the surroundings.

Merida stretched, Rapunzel still in bow form and in her hand as she psyched herself up. She'd never faced another Knight before. She and Rapunzel were used to battling bandits and monsters, so they were expecting this to be their hardest battle yet. Snotlout had his arms cross over his chest, keeping his face casual at an attempt to look cool for his fellow classmates and friends.

Outside the ring his friends and tribesman took in his opponent, the newcomer who they'd never seen before. A blonde girl with a braided

ponytail looked the redhead up and down. She was certainly confident, that was a fact. Now it was time to see if it was all talk or if she had the skills to back it up. Snotlout was good, having earned his B-rank. Could a D-rank hope to beat him?

"Alright kids, I want a clean match. Pretty much anything goes, but please, try not to kill each other," Aster said to them. "Got it?" The two teens nodded. "Well alright then, get to it!" Aster shouted.

The dragon on Snotlout's shoulder opened it wings, looking at Merida with yellow eyes and puffing smoke before flapping his wings and leaping off to hover just before the boy. The dragon tapped into it's own magic, his whole body igniting and becoming enshrouded in flames. They got bigger and wilder, temporarily seeming to swallow up Snotlout, but they soon vanished.

"Well, how do you like me now?!" Snotlout called out cockily as he swung his eight foot long red and orange broadsword in a large arc before him. There were what looked like horns near the pommel, and the blade was flat and looked like Hookfang's jaws.

"Meh, not impressed," Merida said to irk him. It worked as he growled and charged her. Merida smirked and got ready, dropping into a slight battle stance. When Snotlout came within striking distance he swung, aiming at her left side. Merida waited, letting the blade come at her before she rolled under it.

She sidestepped as he followed it up with an overhead swing, driving his blade into the ground and smashing the surface where it made contact. Snotlout let loose a battle cry as he kept swinging at her. Merida and Rapunzel assessed him. Though he was undoubtedly strong by his stocky physique to use a sword of that size like he did they assumed he was using his magic to augment his strength.

Unlike Implements their partners had very little magic in comparison. So generally Knights used their magic to enhance their physical abilities, like Snotlout did for great strength. Even Merida learned how to do this, usually opting to use her magic toward speed, agility, and her eyesight.

This allowed her to easily evade and read Snotlout's attacks and movements.

With a huff Snotlout dropped let his blade rest on the floor. He glared at Merida, standing a few paces away and smirking at him. "Why haven't you been fighting back?" he growled at her.

"Waiting. I intend to beat you with just one shot," Merida told him with a confident smile. The students whispered amongst themselves, wondering if Merida and Rapunzel were powerful enough to beat a B-rank with just one attack.

"Yeah right. Don't make me laugh!" Snotlout cried as he charged her again.

"You know while it's impressive how you can wield that, such a big weapon makes you very easy to read," Merida stated as she dodged his next series of attack. "You can really only swing over hand or horizontally. Very predictable," she teased. She leapt over a low

swing before dropping to her knees as he swung at her midsection. She smirked all the while as she always danced just out of reach. "Predicatble," she repeated with a click of her tongue.

"Predict this!" Snotlout called out. His next swing was an overhand one. Merida saw it coming and twirled out of the way. But this time when his blade made contact flames burst forth. Merida was too slow to some of the flames licked at her arm and singed her hair. She leapt back, hissing and wincing in pain as she looked to see her arm had been burned.

'_Oh my gosh Mer, are you ok?' _Rapunzel asked in concern.

"Aye Punz, I'm fine," Merida muttered under her breath.

'_Maybe I should_-'

"Nay. Just keep preparing," Merida insisted.

'Mer I know you said you wanted to beat him with on attack, but maybe-'

_"_I said we'd beat him in one attack and I meant it. A Knight honors his word," Merida replied stubbornly. Rapunzel sighed as she let Merida do as she pleased, hoping that she could just stay conscious until they were ready to counter attack.

Snotlout pointed the end of his sword at her and remained on the spot. Merida arched a brow, wondering what he was waiting for when suddenly the blade split in half and parted, opening like the jaws of a dragon. From between the two halves the air started to sizzle before fire bloomed and then leapt out at her.

Merida darted around the field, dodging a torrent of flames and fireballs the stocky boy was sending at her. Aster watched from the sidelines, wondering why the red head wasn't fighting back. What was she waiting for? Snotlout meanwhile attacked with no real strategy, just overwhelming attack and flames.

Merida ran to the side as she avoided the fires, only to skid to a stop as a wall of them leapt out in front of her. Then another appeared behind her, and another from the other side until she was closed in, the only opening blocked by Snotlout himself.

Snotlout smiled proudly, puffing out his chest. "And that's what we call strategy," he boasted. With a cry he pointed his sword at her and sent a wave of fire. Merida grit her teeth and cursed as she leapt back, into the wall of flames behind her and out the other side.

Her hair and clothing were singed, smoke wafting off of them, but she had no time to spare as Snotlout leapt through the flames and at them, sword cocked back before he swung. Merida had no time to dodge, having been caught off guard, she simply held up her bow, letting the blade collide with it.

There was a loud clang of metal as the strength of Snotlout's swing sent Merida flying. She hit the ground hard before getting her feet under her and sliding to a stop.

Aster admired her tenacity. But unless she planned to do something she was sure to lose.

"Sorry Punz. You ok?" Merida whispered.

'_Yeah. I'm fine. But I hate when you use me to block attacks. That hurt,' _she complained.

"Aye. Sorry," Merida apologized. Merida glanced upward, taking in the sun's position. She smiled, seeing exactly as she'd hoped.

Everyone looked on, a little disappointed at the boring battle. They thought the redhead would have had more to show them.

Snotlout only smirked. He knew he would win. It was strange that she hadn't fought back, but maybe she was just stupid. Or maybe he'd just been too awesome and she'd frozen up. Either way, this duel was-

He blanched as he noticed her bow starting to glow. Not only that the burn marks on Merida's arms began to fade. Everyone else notice it as well, they gasped in amazement. Aster noticed that and more. Her bow continued to shine, getting brighter and brighter by the second until it became almost hard to look at.

Not only that, he could sense something interesting. Merida and Rapunzel's magic power was starting to climb drastically.

"Well I hope you've enjoyed beating me around a little Snotface. But now I'm going to finish this, just like I said I would," Merida stated. She pulled back on the drawstring and took aim. Immediately an arrow of pure light materialized in the place a real arrow would. But it got bigger, and bigger, and bigger.

Snotlout stood on the spot as her bow emitted an intense golden aura.

"My partner here can use her magic to not only heal wounds, but also fire off arrows made of pure sunlight," Merida informed him. "And when the sun is at it's peak, so is her power," Merida added. This is what they'd been counting on. Their trump card.

It was noon, and the sun was at it's highest.

Rapunzel and Merida started to focus their magics, letting them converge and pool together.

Snotlout did the same with Hookfang, the entire length of the blade became wrapped in flames. He swung it over his head, sending out a torrent of flames right at her.

Merida held her stance, letting the energy build and build before she finally let it loose.

In a golden flash her arrow flew across the arena, carving a trench in the ground before meeting the advancing flames and ripping through them. Snotlout flinched in surprise and was too slow to get out of the way. The light of the arrow blinded him as it collided with him.

Aster and the other students gasped and covered their eyes. Aster

looked in amazement as the arrow of light continued across the arena, eventually reaching the barriers meant to contain magic. He watched as cracks appeared on the very air. He could hardly believe it, their magic was breaching the barriers.

A hole was pierced through them, freeing the arrow of light.

"Everyone down!" Aster shouted. All student hit the floor as the arrow flew over their head, flying and then colliding with a far courtyard wall with a loud explosion, scattering smoke and bit of it everywhere. When the dust settled Aster looked to see a large chuck of the wall missing, leaving a scorched, smouldering, gaping hole in it.

He looked to the arena to see Snotlout on the ground, hole front of his body scorched, eyebrow burnt off and with Hookfang back in his normal form and splayed out on his wielder unconscious.

'I wonder if we went a tad too far,' Rapunzel said sheepishly.

Merida hummed as she inspected the damage they'd caused. A deep trench carved into the ground and a gaping hole in the courtyard wall... "Perhaps we went just a smidge too far," she conceded to her partner.

* * *

><p>Lunch came around after the duel, Snotlout was taken and being treated in the infirmary and the mess hall was buzzing with talk. People flocked to Merida and Rapunzel, showering them with admiration and praise. Rapunzel soaked it all up with a smile, always the social butterfly as she made new friends. Merida had no interest in making friends, she took it all in stride, answering questions casually as she continued to eat.<p>

"I could have beaten that Lout within the first thirty seconds if I wanted. I was just showing off," Merida said to one person. "I can shoot the wings off a fly without killing it from half a mile away," she bragged. Everyone oohed and awed in wonder at the new students.

Eventually lunch ended and during the short break before their next class the girls went and found their lockers. They were happy to see theirs were right next to each other. They put their books into their lockers and were about to head to their next class when they stopped, staring at Toothless who was scratching at the bottom of a locker and whining.

Rapunzel cocked her head to the side and approached. Toothless turned his head to look at her and whined, eyes flicking to the locker.

"What's wrong Toothless? Where's your boy?" Rapunzel asked.

"He's stuck," came a voice from the locker.

Rapunzel looked up at the locker door. "Hiccup?" she asked.

"Yeah. It's me. Rapunzel right?"

"Yes."

"Cool...can you get me out of here? Please?" Hiccup asked sheepishly. He relayed his locker combination. Rapunzel opened it, leaping back with a yelp as Hiccup fell out ungracefully. His partner nuzzed and crooned him in concern. "I'm ok bud," he said as he picked up his dragon and stood up.

"Are you ok? Why were you in there?" Rapunzel asked.

"Comes with being on the bottom of the totem pole," Hiccup said referring to his E-Rank. "Usually my buddy let's me out. But he's out on a quest right now," he said with a shrug.

"Alright Punz, time to go," Merida said as she grabbed her friend by the shoulder and turned her around.

"Oh, ok. Bye Hiccup!" Rapunzel called back. Merida glanced back at Hiccup with a frown. He gave them a small wave. She snorted and rolled her eyes. No way were they going to be seen with him, the bottom of the barrel.

Their next class was taught by the very same person who'd recommended them to the academy. The fairy named Toothiana. she smiled and gave them a small wave before getting into her lecture. She explained the history of Knight and Implements and how their powers worked.

She explained how the bond between Knight and Implement played a powerful part in their abilities. The greater the bond the greater their magic.

"As your bond grows you'll find yourselves able to use a more wide and powerful range of abilities. In some cases an Implement's weapon form can even take on a spontaneous change," she revealed. Merida and Rapunzel shared a glance, that was new information to them.

"So, as an example. Let us see how strong some of your bonds are," Toothiana said to everyone. She gestured to a circular glyph on the ground, explaining how the glyph could measure the bond strength between Knight and Implement and convert it to a numerical value.

"Any volunteers?" she asked.

"Right here," Merida called out as she raised her hand. She and Rapunzel got up and made their way to the glyph.

"Alright. Just stand right there please and wait," Toothiana said. The girls did as told, standing in the center of the glyph as they awaited their results. Merida and Rapunzel figured their value would be very high. They were best friends after all.

Toothiana looked at her Speculum as the glyph gave her their value.

"Oh," Toothiana said quietly. "Looks like you have a value of 48," she relayed.

"Oh, well that sounds high," Merida said unconcerned.

"Out of 100," Toothiana added.

The girls blinked as that sunk in.

"What?!" Merida cried in disbelief. "Forty eight? That can't be right. We're best friends," she insisted.

Toothiana only shrugged. "Well that just means you have room for improvement," she tried to say to reassure them. The girls went back to their seat, Merida grumbling and scowling all the way. Rapunzel was silent, but also disappointed that their bond was apparently so weak.

After that lecture the girls were done for the day. Anna joined them, having come to be on friendly terms with them. They stood at their lockers as she tried to reassure them that their bond was strong despite the numerical value.

"Well I think that thing is wrong," Merida said with a huff.

Anna pursed her lips and rubbed the back of her neck as she tried to think of a change of subject. "Oh, maybe you should check your ranking now," Anna suggested.

Merida and Rapunzel looked at her. "Why?"

"Well like I said, now that they've seen what you can do it might have gone up. Battling higher ranked Knights is one way to increase your ranking."

The girls hummed in thought before pulling out their Speculums. They thought of themselves. Their profiles were pulled up.

"C-rank!" Merida cried angrily. She cursed in frustration.

"Well it's better than D-rank, right?" Rapunzel said to try and calm her down. Merida grumbled unhappily but her words sated her slightly.

"Maybe we should challenge an A-rank next. If we beat of one those I'm sure we'll be A-ranked too," Merida thought. She looked to Anna. "So Anna, who's an A-rank in our class?"

Anna looked around before picking out several of them. "See that blonde with the dragon on her shoulder," she said as she pointed the girl out.

Rapunzel and Merida looked. They took in a blonde with a small blue bird like dragon on her shoulder. "That's Astrid. She and her partner Stormfly are A-ranked," she explained. Suddenly a black haired girl came to stand beside her, grabbing her attention as they made idle conversation, and on her shoulder was a small metallic looking dragon. "That's Heather, also an A-rank."

Suddenly another girl walked right by the two of them. Rapunzel and Merida couldn't help but stare at her pale complexion and platinum blond hair placed up in a tight bun. "That's Elsa. Also A-rank," Anna said, the girls hummed, and they couldn't help but notice how her

eyes lingered on Elsa. The girl even glanced at Anna, maintaining eye contact as she walked by.

"There's another guy named Hans," Anna paused to sigh dreamily. "He's super cool. A true Knight," she said as she blushed to herself. "Anyway, while I do think you guys are pretty strong, I'd suggest not challenging an A-rank right off the bat."

"Well I-" Merida was saying before her Speculum started to flash. She stared down at it, wondering what this meant. Rapunzel's was flashing too. Anna pulled out hers, also flashing. Students murmured to themselves, all of them holding their mirrors which her flashing.

"What's going on?" Rapunzel asked curiously.

"Someone has issued a duel," Anna explained. "I have to go. See you guys later," she called as she ran off. They looked after her as she ran off before looking back to their mirrors. They still didn't know how they fully worked, so they opted to follow the students as they came to fill a hallway with a view of the courtyard.

They managed to find a good spot to observe, only to see Elsa standing in a large arena. Her opponents looked to be two older students, they assumed they were in a higher grade. Elsa was standing alone, making them wonder where her partner was when suddenly a figure ran out onto the courtyard and to her.

Merida and Rapunzel gasped, recognizing who it was almost immediately.

"Anna?" Merida said in surprise. Merida looked to her Speculum, thinking of Anna and pulling up her profile. And to her amazement Anna was also an A-ranked knight.

Anna took a few breaths as she stood by Elsa's side. "Sorry. Got here as fast as I could," she said to her partner.

"Hmm," was all Elsa said in response. Anna sighed, same old Elsa. "Ready?" Elsa asked. Anna nodded. A teacher came to observe and referee the duel, and at his signal the two sides prepared to face off.

One of the boys facing her turned into a large double sided axe, his partner smiled maliciously as he stared down the girls.

Elsa rolled her eyes. "We beat these two like two weeks ago. What do they think has changed since then?"

Anna only shrugged in response. With a breath she closed her eyes, tapping into her magic as her body began to unravel. She took on a crystalline look, her became transparent and see through before shattering, turning into what looked like snowflakes as they swirled around her partner. They converged on her right hand, aligning and taking on a new form.

With a flash of white light her form regained a solid state. And in Elsa's hand was a halberd, nearly six feet long with a pure white shaft and a shining head. Elsa gripped her partner firmly in hand before she began to spin her around her body at blurring

speed.

_'Getting dizzy!' _Anna said in her partner's mind.

With one more spin Elsa held her weapon firmly in both hands and leveled it at her opponent. The Knight charged her, axe cocked back before he swung. Elsa weaved under the attack before trusting pointed end of her halberd at him. The boy barely jerked his head to the side, but received a shallow scratch to his cheek.

He hissed and howled in pain as his scratch began to burn, but his cry was cut short as Elsa struck him squarely on the side of his face with the shaft of her weapon. The boy stumbled to the side before spinning on his heel to retaliate, only for his axe to be parried and batted away.

He reeled back, swinging wildly as Elsa advanced on him, expertly spinning and twirling her weapon in her hands at dizzying speeds. It was like a whirlwind of blades circling her as the boy was unable to get in a strike. He cringed and winced in pain as he kept getting his. His legs, face, neck, and torso all received painful smacks by Elsa. Everyone couldn't help but admire Elsa's form as she deftly adn gracefully used her weapon, eyes narrowed in focus, and form perfect.

'_Stop with the spinning please! I can't even puke in this form! It's awful!' _Anna reminded her.

Elsa rolled her eyes as she rammed the but end of her weapon into the boy's gut. Sending him rolling and tumbling backwards.

_'Let's just end this already,' _Anna said in boredom.

"Indeed," Elsa said with a short nod. She and Anna began to pool their magic. The winds around them began to stir. The air began to chill. Even the student could feel it from where they were watching. The boys finally managed to get up, staring at Elsa and Anna as they prepared to end the duel.

With a cry Elsa struck the ground before her with the blade of her halberd. Ice bloomed and shot outward across the ground toward the boys. And when it made contact with them it it exploded out of the ground and upward.

The students gasped as a giant icy protrusion loomed over courtyard, casting a shadow that covered nearly everything. The girls' opponents were trapped, shivering, weak, and unable to continue. The teacher declared Elsa and Anna the winner, prompting them to use their magic to make the ice recede.

With their victory Anna changed back to her regular form with a flash of light. She cheered and turned to give her partner a hug, only to find Elsa already heading back inside.

Her shoulders sagged in disappointment. "'Good job Anna. Gee, thanks Elsa'"" she muttered to herself. She dropped her head as she followed after her.

Merida and Rapunzel stared in wonder at the two girls as they made their way out of the courtyard. So this was the power of an A-ranked

Knight? They exchanged a glance.

They had competition.

* * *

><p>chapter 2. So becuase of the positive reviews I guess I'll contiue the story.

**Atom King: Maybe, maybe not. Hard to think of ideas for what or who their partners would be and what they'd use as weapons. Got an idea? I'm open to suggestions. **

3. Chapter 3

Friction

Later that night after classes Merida dragged Anna into she and Rapunzel's room and demanded an explanation to why she'd hid her rank from them.

"Well you never asked?" Anna said with a weak chuckle and a shrug.

Merida scowled at her. "Well that's technically true," Rapunzel conceded.

"So, this...Elsa is your partner?" Merida asked.

Anna nodded. "Yeah...and a little more than that actually," she added with a flush. The girls awaited for her to explain. "She's also my big sister," Anna revealed. The girls were shocked to hear this. But after dwelling on it they came to realize Anna and Elsa did look a little alike.

"Well I got to admit. You two are pretty good," Merida said honestly.

"Hehe. Thanks. It's mostly Elsa who does the hard work. But we try."

"I'd love to meet her," Rapunzel chimed in.

"Uh...sure. I can introduce you guys I guess," Anna said with a shrug. The girls smiled and spent a few hours speaking and passing the time together before Anna went back to her room for the night. The girls went to bed, but Elsa and Anna's battle replayed in their heads the whole night.

This school was full of powerful people. They'd have to step up their game if they wanted to reach the top.

* * *

><p>The next day the girls woke up, washed, and dressed before joining Anna for breakfast. Anna apologized for Elsa's absence, saying she'd asked her to join them but was refused. The girls couldn't help but notice this seemed to make Anna rather sad as she cast her eyes down.<p>

They distracted her, asking her question on other ways to increase their rank and perhaps even improve their bond.

Anna hummed in thought. "Well you guys could go on quests," she pointed out. After a moments of blank stares she elaborated, explaining how there was a bulletin full of requests made by distant towns and villages, ranging from dealing with bandits, to eliminating a monster that may have moved too close to their liking. Each quest had a suggested Rank a student should be if they wanted to go, but they were allowed to take whichever they wanted as long as they accepted whatever the consequences would be.

"As for improving your bond strength...not sure," Anna said with a shrug.

"Oh come on. You're an A-rank. You must know something," Merida pleaded.

Anna pondered her request. "It's just something that supposed to develop over time. You can't just force it," Anna said with a shrug. "The bond strength between Elsa and I is only about 65, which is the average."

The girls furrowed their brows, expecting the bond strength between sibling to be much stronger.

"Well I need ours to be greater than 48. I personally feel our bond is a 100," Merida said with a huff.

"Aww," Rapunzel said with a smile.

"No one has a 100. Well-" Anna trailed off. The girls perked up, staring at her for answers. "Actually the only person in this school who has a 100 would be Hiccup and Toothless," Anna said as she jerked a thumb back to where the lowest ranked student in the entire school was sitting alone. They both flinched in surprise before looking at the young man and his dragon in disbelief.

"The E-rank," Merida said indignantly. "That has to be wrong," she insisted.

"Maybe we should ask him for advice," Rapunzel offered.

"Nay. We are not going to go asking the bottom of the ladder for help," she said adamantly.

"But-"

"No!" Merida said with finality. Rapunzel sagged in defeat as she resumed eating her food. She thought Hiccup was a nice guy, he'd make a good friend in her opinion.

The day went on as the girls attended classes, stopping by the bulletin board Anna had spoken of as they did a quick once over of the available quests. Nothing particularly grabbed their eyes, so they left and decided to check back later.

Eventually they came to gym and combat class, once again going out into the courtyard for exercise and a little practice. Aster had many

students practice with normal weapons, to get a feel for them, saying that their practice would transfer over when they used their partners. He also made them run laps and do basic exercises like pushups, sit up, and jumping jacks.

Closer to the end of the class he decided to have two students duel. He called up two students, one boy and one girl. The the they didn't know, and the other, Hiccup.

"How about it Mr. Haddock. Feeling up for a duel today?" Aster asked with an arched brow. Hiccup chuckled weakly as he stood at his side of the arena. His opponent was a girl and her female partner. Her partner changed, turning herself into a rapier. She pointed it at Hiccup in challenge and waited.

"I forfeit," Hiccup called out as he raised his hand up.

"Of course," Aster said with a sigh. He congratulated the girl on her win as they both left the arena. Merida looked to see the other students who had dragon partners staring at Hiccup and shaking their heads in blatant disappointment. Hiccup stood off to the side by himself which Merida found strange seeing as he and the others were supposed to come from the same place.

She shrugged it off. It wasn't her concern.

After class everyone went to lunch, during which Merida couldn't help but stare at Hiccup from across the mess hall. Why the heck wouldn't he fight? Was he that weak that he wouldn't even try? Was he just a coward? She glanced around the room at all the other Knights with dragons. How could they all be such high ranked except him. It irked her for some reason.

After lunch they prepared for their next class going to their lockers. Merida excused herself to the bathroom while Rapunzel pulled out her books for the next class. As she was doing so she suddenly felt something tugging at the end of her skirt. She glanced down, eyes meeting the wide green eyes of Toothless. He crooned at her before flicking his eyes over to Hiccup's locker and then bounding over.

Rapunzel followed him, and she guessed what was wrong by how he scratched at it and crooned in worry.

"Hiccup?" she said to the door.

"Yep. Me again. Sorry to bother you. But could you...you know?" After a few second Rapunzel opened his locker door, allowing the tall young man to fall out and to the floor. He sighed in relief at being freed from his prison and looked up at her gratefully.

"Is this going to be a regular thing?" Rapunzel asked with a hint of playfulness.

"I hope not. I'd like to greet you with a 'good afternoon' every once in awhile. You know, break the monotony," he quipped, earning a giggle from Rapunzel. With that Hiccup turned and reached into his locker for his next set of books. After collecting them in hand he thanked Rapunzel one last time before preparing to head off.

"Hiccup hold on for a sec," Rapunzel suddenly said. Hiccup complied, stopping and glancing back at her. "I was hoping I could get some advice?"

"From me?" Hiccup asked with an arched brow. "You do know I'm the lowest student in the school right?"

"Yeah. But I heard your bond strength with Toothless is a 100. How can I get that score with Merida?"

Hiccup stared at her, seeing the pleading in her eyes. Hiccup brought a hand up and tapped his chin in thought. "How long have you and Merida known each other?"

"Two or three years I guess."

"Hmm. There's not much I can tell you. All relationships are different, so the way to strengthen your bond will be different from how me and Toothless do it," he said as said dragon clambered up onto his shoulder to nuzzle him. Hiccup smiled and scratched him under the chin. "I can tell that Merida is the more outgoing one of the two of you," Hiccup said out of the blue.

Rapunzel blinked as she thought his statement over. "Yeah...I guess so."

"All I can tell you is that a relationship is a two way street. It's not uncommon for one person to take charge. But besides being a leader they also have to be willing to listen from time to time," Hiccup offered. He looked at her and smiled.

As Rapunzel was absorbing this information she was suddenly gripped by the shoulder and turned around. "C'mon Punz. We have class," Merida said as she gave Hiccup a frown. In her opinion there was nothing an E-rank could have to offer them.

For the rest of the day Rapunzel ran Hiccup's words through her mind. She contemplated her relationship with Merida. Ever since they'd met Merida had always been the one to take charge and lead them. Which was necessary given Rapunzel's lack of worldly knowledge at the beginning. But even now Rapunzel could admit Merida could be a tad...bossy. But they were still best friends.

After their final class they went to their lockers to put away their books. As Merida was putting away her books she suddenly shivered.

"Everything ok Mer?" Rapunzel asked in concern.

"Aye. But is it strangely cold in here. Or is it just me?" she asked.

Suddenly a cold wind swept through the hall, blowing up all the females' skirts at once. Merida and Rapunzel shrieked as they tried to push their skirts back down, and as they did the wind died down, allowing them to hear unrepentant laughter coming from above them.

All eyes turned to the ceiling to see a familiar figure floating in the air, leisurely sitting on his hooked staff as the winds held him

aloft.

"Ladies. Your prince has returned!" A white haired and pale skinned young man declared loudly with a grin. He was shouted at by nearly every girl in the hallway, some even threw things at him. But the teen only laughed louder as he weaved through the air before settling down beside Hiccup at his locker.

"Sup Hiccup," Jack said with a grin.

"Hey Jack. Back from your quest? How'd it go?" Hiccup asked curiously.

"Pssh. Easy. One tribe of dead, village pillaging goblins, check," Jack said with a wink. Hiccup chuckled at his side. Jack glanced past him at two girls he didn't recognize. "We get some new ladies," Jack said as he waggled his brows at them.

Hiccup nodded. "Blonde one is Rapunzel. Redhead is Merida, They're alright," Hiccup said with a casual shrug.

"Well I'm going to go say hi," Jack said as he began to saunter over. Hiccup sighed and trekked behind him. When Jack reached the girls he leaned against a locker and smiled at them. "Hello ladies. The name's Jack Overland. But most call me Jack Frost. Cuz I'm cool as ice."

"Ignore him. He thinks he's the greatest thing since man learned how to use fire," Hiccup commented from behind.

"Dude," Jack said back indignantly.

Merida rolled her eyes. "Hello Jack. I'm Rapunzel," Rapunzel said offering her hand. He accepted it and gave it a quick shake.

As he opened his mouth to say something Anna walked up. "Hey Jack. Glad you're back," she greeted.

"Hey Anna. Good to be back. Just saying hi to the new students."

"I noticed," Anna said with a smirk. "Elsa went that way by the way," Anna said as she jerked a thumb down the hall.

Jack's grin grew. He mounted his staff and gave the girls one last smile. "Sorry ladies. I'm off to see my girlfriend."

"She's not really his girlfriend," Hiccup revealed.

"We're in love. She just doesn't know it yet." With a wave Jack zoomed off down the hallway in search of his heart's desire.

"I better go make sure nobody tries to kill him," Hiccup said as he walked after him.

The girls stared after the two boys curiously.

"Anna?" Merida said to get an explanation.

"Jack Overland. Student here. He'll flirt with anything in a skirt but has had an apparent interest in my sister for quite some time,"

she stated.

"What rank is he?" Rapunzel couldn't help but wonder.

"C-rank. But he's a little peculiar," Anna said. She elaborated, explaining how Jack was strong enough to regularly best B and even A-ranked students, but every time victory was guaranteed he'd forfeit before delivering the finishing blow. Despite his teacher's insistence he never accepted an increase in rank, something everyone found strange. Even stranger was that he and Hiccup were best friends.

The girls hummed in thought before heading off. They stopped to check the bulletin board to see if there were any quests they wanted, but found none they thought were worth doing.

* * *

><p>Later that night as Merida was helping Rapunzel brush her hair, Rapunzel was still dwelling on Hiccup's words.<p>

Merida listened to her...right? "So Merida. I was looking at clubs. I was thinking of joining a few. What do you think?"

"Why would you want to join a club?" Merida said with a snort.

"I don't know. They sound fun and we'd meet new people. Make more friends."

"We did nay come here to make friends Punz," Merida reminded her.

"But we're in school. We have classmates-"

"That are our competition," Merida reminded her.

"Yeah but-"

"We don't need to join any clubs Punz. We should be focusing on getting stronger and increasing our bond strength so we can defeat one of those A-ranks move up." Rapunzel sighed and nodded in defeat. Well at least she listened.

As they got ready for bed Rapunzel though about her relationship with Merida. It wasn't perfect. But it was still better than being locked away in that tower.

It was better than having your whole life controlled by someone else who claimed to know what was best...

Rapunzel suddenly sat up in bed. "I'm joining a club," she said aloud.

Merida stirred, sitting up and turning on a light. "What?"

"I'm joining a club. I'm sorry if you don't like it but I'm doing it," Rapunzel said firmly.

"Rapunzel, I though we-"

"No, there was no 'we'. You said no. But I can do what I want too."

"Ugh. Why do you want to join a useless club so badly?" Merida said as she rolled her eyes.

Rapunzel frowned at her. "Because I _want _to. Isn't that reason enough?"

"We're supposed to be a team Rapunzel. Remember? We stick together no matter what. Ring a bell?"

"Well sometime you don't act like we're a team Mer."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Sometimes you're just bossy Merida, and you try to tell me what to do all the time."

"I don't do that," Merida said in offense.

"You just did not five minutes ago," Rapunzel pointed out.

"Oh, so I'm bossy because I don't think you should join a stupid club?"

"It's not stupid! At least not to me. Why can't you understand that? You're treating me just like mother used to."

"Oh? So you would rather I left you back in that tower?" Merida spat at her.

"Sometimes it feels like I never left," Rapunzel muttered.

Merida leapt out of her bed angrily. "I can't believe you would say that! I spent days talking you down from that tower! I became your first and only friend! I showed you the world and protected you! How dare you compare me to your mother!"

Rapunzel leapt out of her own bed, facing Merida with a glare. "Well maybe I wouldn't if you'd stop acting like _yours!_" Rapunzel shouted back at her.

Merida took in a sharp breath in shock. Rapunzel flinched, slapping her hands over her mouth as she realized she'd gone too far.

"Merida-" she tried to say. But Merida didn't listen as she grabbed her blankets and pillows and retreated to the bathroom. She gave her a dirty look before purposely slamming the door shut and locking it.

Rapunzel stood there, eyes on the door as she felt her guts twist into knots. That was probably their first fight ever. And now her closest friend was mad at her. When you didn't have many people to call friends you treasure the ones you did have.

And Merida was Rapunzel's dearest treasure.

* * *

><p>The next day Hiccup was at his locker. Jack was leaning against the one next to his, making idle chatter about how pretty Elsa was and how he'd one day win her heart. Hiccup nodded as he tuned him out, only to close his locker and look at him when he felt Jack tap his shoulder.<p>

Jack motioned to something behind him. Hiccup turned and was met with Rapunzel standing before him, eyes cast down to the floor.

"Hey Punz. Morning," Hiccup greeted casually.

Rapunzel looked up, surprising Hiccup when he noticed how her eyes were watering.

"Uh...something wrong Rapunzel?" Hiccup asked.

Her lower lip began to quiver as a tear leaked out, running down her cheek. She threw her arms around him, stunning the auburn haired teen as he held his arms in the air awkwardly.

"Merida hates me now!" Rapunzel wailed sadly. She began to sob into his chest. Hiccup glanced back at Jack for help. The boy only shrugged, clueless on what he should do. Hiccup swallowed before placing a hand tentatively behind her back and rubbing circles.

"There there," he said to try and soothe her. She sniffled.

"How about you tell me what happened?" Rapunzel looked up at him. Eyes puffy and red.

"I promise to do what I can to help you."

* * *

><p>new chap

once more, not a true Soul Eater au

4. Chapter 4

Resolution

"Hmmm. I see," Hiccup said as he stroked his chin. He was sitting next to Rapunzel in their first class as she managed to relay her situation with Merida. Apparently the two girls had never gotten into a fight before. And now Merida wasn't speaking to Rapunzel at all, she'd even chosen to sit apart from her and by herself. Rapunzel was convinced Merida hated her now, and the thought was breaking her heart.

Hiccup was sure that wasn't the case. Something he said to try and cheer her up. "Friends fight sometimes Rapunzel. It's a pretty normal thing," Hiccup said with a shrug. Rapunzel sniffled as Toothless nudged her hand with his nose and Jack's partner, a small colorful fairy by the name of Baby Tooth, rested on her shoulder, tweeting at her to try and cheer her up.

"Yeah. Me and Hiccup have had our share of arguments. But we're still best friends," Jack said in agreement.

"This is all my fault. All because I wanted to join a dumb club," Rapunzel muttered sadly.

"No, it's not Rapunzel. You have every right to do what you want to do. Merida needs to understand that you're your own person," Hiccup argued.

Rapunzel looked at him, eyes unsure. She'd give anything for Merida to speak to her again. She really didn't know where she'd be without Merida. No...she knew exactly where she'd be. Locked away in a tower, no friends, no freedom, the days coming and going in a blur of monotony as she grew old and eventually died. Wondering and waiting for when her life would begin.

"I'll try to talk to Merida for you. K?" Hiccup offered. Rapunzel only shrugged.

After class Hiccup left Rapunzel with Jack as he followed after Merida. He closed in on her and gave her a tap on the shoulder. She whipped around, only to glare at him.

"What do ye want E-rank?" she muttered with a frown.

"Well, my name is Hiccup. Not sure if you know," he started. Her glare only deepened. "Anyway, it seems like you and Rapunzel have had a bit of a...falling out?"

"That is none of your own business," Merida spat at him. With that she turned on her heel and walked briskly away. Hiccup exchanged a glance with Toothless on his shoulder. The dragon gave his version of a shrug before flicking his eyes to her retreating form.

Hiccup sighed as he followed after her. He made a point of sitting next to her at their next class. Merida scowled as he took a seat beside her. "Hello. Me again," Hiccup said as he rubbed the back of his neck.

"Why are you following me lad? Do you like me or something?" Merida asked with a blank face and an arched brow.

Hiccup's cheeks began to turn red. "No. I mean not that you're not likeable. Not that I like you, but that's not to say that I dislike you. I mean you are pretty..." Hiccup paused to slap his forehead. "Focus Hiccup. Focus," he muttered to himself. He took a breath to get back on track.

"Look. Rapunzel is really sad. She thinks you hate her and-"

"I don't hate her!" Merida interrupted sharply. Hiccup looked at her as she flushed in embarrassment.

"Of course. You just think she's not smart enough to-"

"Rapunzel is not dumb!" Merida interrupted him with a glare. Hiccup couldn't help but smirk at how easily she took offense to someone insulting her friend. "She's just naive. She still doesn't fully understand how the world works," Merida said softly.

"Was she locked in a tower or something?" Hiccup asked jokingly.

Merida flinched and swallowed. "No. She's just had a very...sheltered childhood," Merida lied.

"So when you guys started travelling together, you had to take charge right?"

"Exactly. The poor lass didn't know how to speak with people. She was just too innocent and friendly. Everything scared her and-Why am I even talking to you about this E-rank?!" Merida suddenly realized. She gave a huff she turned her attention to the instructor and ignored Hiccup.

After class Hiccup went to Rapunzel. He didn't have much to tell her. That only made Rapunzel sadder. They spent the day trying to console her, Anna lending her help as well. Merida stuck to herself for the rest of the day, ignoring Rapunzel during all their classes and lunch.

"I know. How about you come to baking club?" Anna suggested to Rapunzel. The blonde only perked up slightly. After classes she joined Anna at her club. She was immediately cheered up as she and Anna, mostly she, made cupcakes and decorated them with colorful frostings. Anna was apparently the worst baker in the club, so the others were glad she had a partner who was competent.

She even brought some of the cupcakes she made back to her room to share with Merida. When she got into her room she paused, noting Merida in bed, back to her.

"Merida. I brought cupcakes," Rapunzel said softly. Merida didn't respond. She simply pulled the covers up over her head. Rapunzel set the cupcakes down before getting ready for bed. As she laid herself down on her bed she cast on last glance at Merida's resting form. She felt her heart clench in her chest.

* * *

><p>The next day went much the same as the day before. Merida remained by herself, ignoring Rapunzel and Anna. But Hiccup couldn't help but notice her fargone stare. As if she was deep in thought. He could see the gears in her mind turning as she turned something over in her mind.<p>

During their next class Hiccup came to sit beside Merida again.

"Hello again."

"E-rank," Merida greeted.

"I do have a name you know."

"I don't care."

Hiccup let out a breath. "So how are you and Rapunzel?" he tried to as casually.

Merida frowned. "Not your business."

Hiccup sighed. "Maybe it's not. Look, I can understand why you had to take charge in the beginning. And I think you've done a good job. You can ease up a little now. You don't have to be her guardian anymore. You can just be her friend," Hiccup told her.

"And friends give and take. They listen to each other. Support each other," he finished before turning his attention to the teacher.

Merida frowned. She didn't need to be lectured by the lowest Knight in the school.

The day continued, they all went about their classes as they normally would. Until at the very end of their last class Merida's and Rapunzel's Speculums started to flash. They looked to their mirrors, and to their surprise they were being challenged to a duel.

By Snotlout.

Both girls suppressed a groan and walked side by side to the courtyard arena. They stood awkwardly side by side as they faced down their opponent. Snotlout's injuries had healed and he was looking for vengeance. He hopped on his feet, psyching himself up for the fight. The girls shuddered in disgust as he spit into his hands and then proceeded to rub his face.

A teacher stood off to the side as he gave the signal to begin their duel. Hookfang immediately took the form of his broadsword. Snotlout swung it around before slamming it into the ground. Flames wrapped around the blade as he smirked at them.

Merida sighed and rolled her eyes before looking to Rapunzel. The girl nodded and transformed, bathing the courtyard in light as she transformed and took her bow form.

Jack whistled, impressed by Rapunzel weapon form. "Cool."

"Something is wrong," Hiccup noted. Jack looked to him and arched a brow. Rapunzel's weapon formed looked...duller. It's usual luster was lacking. Her form was a faded cloudy yellow. Not the gleaming gold it usually was.

"Something must be wrong with Rapunzel," Anna said. Hiccup nodded.

Snotlout smirked as he pointed Hookfang at them. "You girls got lucky last time. But noon has already passed. You can't use your trump card anymore," he said proudly.

Merida rolled her eyes as she pulled back on the drawstring. An arrow of pure sunlight formed, but Merida paused as she took it in. It was thin. There was still plenty of sunlight for Rapunzel to draw strength from. She was about to ask her about it when she was forced to leap back as Snotlout came swinging at her.

Merida fired an arrow at him. But he waved his sword to block. She rolled under a slash before firing once again. But he blocked once

more. Something was wrong with her. Them. Merida could feel it. Her mind just wasn't in the fight. Neither was Rapunzel. Rapunzel's magic felt distant and far away even though she was in her hand, not at all how it usually felt whenever they fought together.

"Rapunzel. What's wrong? Your arrows are weaker than normal," Merida muttered quietly. She rolled sideways as a stream of flames leapt at her.

'_Sorry. I'll get it together_,' she apologized.

The fight continued, Hiccup, Anna, and Jack noticed how sloppy the girls seemed. They were distracted, no doubt by the feelings lingering from their fight. Knight and Implement had to be in synch, focused on the task at hand. They needed to get past this or they were going to lose.

Merida sighed. She leapt over a swing from her opponent and then blocked the next swing with Rapunzel. The power of the blow sent them rolling away. She winced as she heard her partner hiss in pain. But Rapunzel didn't say anything as Merida was forced to use her to block Snotlout's assault. Merida felt her hands beginning to burn the heat from Snotlout's weapon seeped into Rapunzel.

She tried to get in a shot, but Snotlout kept easily blocked them with the flat of the blade. Smirking haughtily as she was sure this duel was his.

Merida silently cursed as she glanced down at her weapon. Rapunzel was silent, but she could feel the tension in her. She sighed in defeat and acceptance before swallowing down her pride and wetting her lips. She was about to do something she hardly ever did.

"I'm sorry Rapunzel," she muttered quietly.

'_What?_' came Rapunzel surprised response.

"For hurting you and-I don't mean to be so bossy. It's just that in the beginning I had to take charge and-"

'_I know Merida. And I'm grateful for all you've done for me. Really I am. But I need you to listen to me more.'_

"I know. And you were right. I always hated how my mother decided everything for me, planned everything in my life, and I didn't even realize I was doing it to someone else. Someone I care about deeply." She paused to blush. "You're my best friend Rapunzel. And my partner. And I'm glad I met you."

She let her words sink in. It was silent in her mind. She hoped Rapunzel believed her.

'_Me too Merida. Me too_,' Rapunzel said sincerely, happily.

Merida smiled as Rapunzel form began to glow. She began to shine, the metal beginning to gleam and reflect the light of the sun. Merida felt Rapunzel's magic begin to rise, resonating with her own and pooling together. She felt Rapunzel's power seeping into her hands, healing the burns she'd received during their duel.

As Snotlout came at them Merida fired an arrow at his blade. Her arrow collided with the blade, causing it to recoil back from the force. Snotlout blanched as Merida shot him in the hand, making him drop Hookfang with a yelp.

'_Merida, I want to try something new. Is that ok?'_

_"_Course it is," Merida told her. With a smile they pooled their magics, making the bow shine a brilliant gold. As Snotlout picked up Hookfang Merida suddenly pointed her bow upward. To everyone's confusion she fired upward and into the sky, directly into the sun.

Snotlout looked up, then down with a dark smile. He didn't know why they'd done that. But he'd make the most of it. He cocked back Hookfang and prepared to charge when a flash of gold fell near his left foot. He glanced down to see a smouldering hole right by his foot.

Another golden flash made him look to see another smouldering hole appear by his right foot. He looked up to suddenly see a rain of golden arrows coming down from the sky and on top of him.

"Crud," Snotlout said as the arrows rained down on him, scattering up dust, dirt, and smoke as they collided with the floor. When the debris cleared Snotlout was once again on the ground, small scorch marks riddling his body and his unconscious partner on top of him.

Rapunzel changed back back to her human form and gave a cheer. She and Merida whooped in celebration before high fiving.

Hiccup and the others smiled at the sight.

The next day during Toothiana's class the girls had their bond strength checked once more. And they were happy to see the strength of their bond had gone up to a 55.

Merida even joined Rapunzel and Anna at their baking club. Though she didn't do anything but eat the finished product at the end. The girls could feel it, their friendship had taken a new turn. A better turn.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Jack were eating lunch as Jack told Hiccup his plan to woo Elsa. Hiccup nodded along blankly, occasionally passing Toothless some of his food while Baby Tooth picked the fruit off Jack's plate.<p>

Then suddenly Anna, Rapunzel, and Merida came to stand across the table before them. Hiccup and Jack looked up in interest as the girls took a seat.

"Hey guys," Rapunzel greeted brightly.

"Hiccup. Jack," Anna greeted with a smile.

"This does not mean we're friends E-rank," Merida said with a frown.

Hiccup couldn't help but smile and chuckle at her attitude. "Noted."

Meanwhile across the mess hall a pair a blue eyes were narrowed into a scowl.

Astrid sat with her friends as she watched the disgrace of the school fraternize with the very people who beat his cousin, twice. It was bad enough he let himself stay at the lowest rank in the entire school, but where was the loyalty to his people? And those new girls? They needed to be knocked down a few pegs.

"Thinking about crushing the rookies Astrid?" asked a dark haired girl at her side.

Astrid kept her eyes on the redhead and her partner. She nodded slowly.

"Shall Windshear and I who her what it's like at the top?"

Astrid shrugged. "Suit yourself Heather," she told the girl casually.

Heather smiled and nodded and smiled at the thought of beating down the new meat.

Time to knock them off their high horse.

5. Chapter 5

The Mystery E-rank

It was another day. It had been relatively uneventful. Merida and Rapunzel were at baking club. Rapunzel was baking cupcakes while Merida licked the leftover batter and watched. As she did she noticed Rapunzel humming to herself, looking strangely happy. Merida arched her brow as she noticed a tinge of pink on the blonde's cheeks.

"Someone is in a good mood," Merida commented.

Rapunzel smiled as she looked at her and let out a giggle. "It's just a good day. And I love baking! It's been too long," Rapunzel said happily.

Merida watched as Rapunzel began decorating the cupcakes with frosting. "Who are these for anyway?" Merida inquired.

"Oh I was just making them for Hiccup as a thank you for being so nice to me," Rapunzel stated.

"And why the heart?"

Rapunzel stiffened before glancing down at the cupcake, realizing she'd inadvertently made a heart. She squeaked and blushed as she began adding more frosting to cover it up.

"Oh," Merida said evilly as she grinned at her friend. "I think you

have a crush on the E-rank. Is that it Punz?" Merida teased.

"No!" Rapunzel cried in embarrassment. She grabbed another cupcake and began to add the frosting. "Hiccup is just really nice. And he's kind of funny. And he helped me out when I needed him. He's also tall and his eyes are..." she trailed off, her cheeks reddening as she let out a sigh. She glanced down and realized she'd made another heart.

"Uh huh," Merida said flatly.

"These are just thank you cupcakes!" Rapunzel cried as she started adding more frosting to cover up the heart.

Merida smirked to herself and rolled her eyes. "Well I'm not going to say I don't think you should try to take this further," Merida said. Rapunzel looked at her. "But I think you could do better," Merida stated casually as she licked her wooden spoon.

"Aww. You care!" Rapunzel squealed as she hugged the redhead tightly.

* * *

><p>The next day Hiccup and Jack were eating breakfast, and as they had been for the last few days the girls joined them.<p>

"Hey guys," Anna greeted.

"Morning," Rapunzel greeted.

"Jack. E-rank," Merida said to acknowledge them.

"Hey guys," Hiccup greeted with a warm smile.

"Ladies," Jack said with a nod.

Their partner also gave the women a greeting.

With that the girls sat across from them. The boys arched a brow however as Rapunzel Pulled out a tray of six cupcakes with colored frosting. She placed them on the table and slid them before Hiccup.

"What's this?" Hiccup asked curiously.

"They're thank you cupcakes," Rapunzel mumbled shyly. "For helping me...us," she said as she gestured between herself and Merida.

"Oh," Hiccup said in surprise. "Well thanks. They look good," Hiccup said in gratitude. A hand reached out and snatched one up. Hiccup frowned and looked over to see Jack eating one of his cupcakes. "Really Jack?"

"What? You don't mind, do you Hic?"

"Well no. But-"

"Thanks, you're a pal," Jack said as he grabbed another one. Hiccup growled at him in annoyance. He glanced down to see only one cupcake

remaining.

"Nomnomnomnomnom!" Hiccup looked over to Anna to see her cheeks full, with frosting and crumbs on her face. She sat up straight, looking anywhere but at him. The cupcakes were her one weakness. Chocolate!

Hiccup looked down to the last one. He was about to take it when a hand reached out form across the table and snatched it up. he looked to see Merida blatantly eating his last cupcake, not even having the decency to try and look repentant.

"Wow Rapunzel. Those were great," Jack complimented.

"Yeah! I'm sure they were delicious!" Hiccup said in indignantly as he cast everyone a scowl.

"Sorry Hiccup. I'll make more next time," Rapunzel said softly.

Hiccup only sighed and waved his hand. "No, it's ok. I appreciate the gesture." Suddenly Jack tapped him on the shoulder. Hiccup looked to him to see Jack motion with his head at something behind the girls. Hiccup followed his gaze, locking eyes with the blonde haired blue eyed girl frowning at him. She motioned with her head.

Hiccup sighed. "If you'll excuse me," Hiccup said as he stood up. They all watched him walked around the table. Toothless jumped and leapt onto his shoulder as he joined the blonde and then walked out of the mess hall.

"Who was that?" Rapunzel asked.

"Astrid," Jack stated flatly.

* * *

><p>"Something you want Astrid?" Hiccup asked the blonde as he stood before her with his arms crossed. Astrid frowned at him. Leaning against her locker with her arms crossed and a disapproving look in her eyes.<p>

"How could you sit with them Hiccup? They beat your cousin twice."

"Snotlout needs to get his butt kicked every now and then. No love lost there," Hiccup replied with an eye roll.

"What about loyalty?"

"Pssshhh! You want to preach loyalty to me? You guys don't even talk to me just because of my rank," Hiccup reminded her.

"Do you remember why we're here Hiccup? Or should I remind you?"

"My memory is just fine Astrid."

"Then why are you so content on staying the lowest rank in the entire school? It's an embarrassment to us! To Berk!"

"We're here, to improve our relation with this kingdom. Which I've been trying to do. All you guys have been doing is perpetuating the stereotype that Berk and the northern tribes are all a bunch of battle crazy savages," Hiccup said back.

Astrid narrowed her eyes and snorted in disgust. "Whatever," she said as she stood up. "They won't be a problem for much longer anyway," she Astrid said as she began to stroll past him. Hiccup raised an arm in her path, instantly halting her.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Red and sunshine are just going to be knocked down a few pegs," Astrid said firmly as she shoved by him.

Hiccup watched her go, glaring at the back of her head. This could only mean one thing. Either Astrid or Heather were going to challenge Merida and Rapunzel to a duel. And those two were vicious when it came to battling. They held nothing back, utterly destroying their opponents, sometimes scarring them permanently.

They may have been new, but they were still his friends. He decided in that moment to step in.

* * *

><p>"So what's the deal with Hiccup and those other guys?" Merida asked Jack as she and the girls walked to class.<p>

"Other guys?" Jack questioned.

"The other people with dragons," Merida clarified. "Don't they come from the same place? Why does it seem like they avoid Hiccup?" Merida couldn't help but ask. She didn't know why she cared. She was just curious.

"Oh yeah. Those guys. Well they and Hiccup are all from a region to the north of this kingdom. Apparently there had been quite a few border skirmishes until just recently. The two sides made peace and as a show of good faith they let some of the younger generation come to this academy," Jak explained.

"Those guys are all obsessed with bringing glory to Berk," Jack said with an eye roll. "They're obsessed with rankings. Hiccup doesn't really care so they kind of ditched him," Jack finished.

"Well no one wants to be associated with a cowardly Knight," Merida said on their behalf. Jack chuckled at her response. "What's so funny?" Merida asked with a frown.

"You think Hiccup is a coward," Jack said with a chuckle.

"He always forfeits every match. Sounds like a coward to me."

"There's a difference between being afraid to fight, and simply not liking to fight. Hiccup doesn't see the point in fighting for rankings and glory. He believes he should only fight when he has too," Jack explained.

Jack smirked. "Let put it to you like this. Even on his worst day, Hiccup could wipe the floor with any A-ranked Knight."

Merida and Rapunzel looked at Jack skeptically. Neither quite sure they believed that. Rapunzel had found Hiccup stuffed into his own locker several times. And Hiccup just didn't give off the feel of a powerful fighter.

The day continued, everyone went about their day like they normally did. But Hiccup seemed strangely distracted. They watched as during physical education class he spoke with the black haired girl with the metallic looking dragon. They spoke back and forth , the girl giggling and blushing at whatever Hiccup was saying until they apparently came to some sort of agreement with a nod.

Merida and Rapunzel exchanged a glance, wondering what that was about.

At the end of the day the girls were putting their books away, chatting as they prepared to head to baking club.

"Pardon me," came a voice. Rapunzel jumped as a pale and platinum blonde blur briskly walked by her, placed herself into her locker and then shut it.

Rapunzel and Merida blinked as they stared at Rapunzel's locker.

"Hey guys." They glanced back to see Jack behind them. "You see Elsa? I could have sworn she came this way."

All eyes flicked to Rapunzel's locker.

"Nope. Haven't seen her," Anna said with a shrug.

"Dang. Alright. See you guys. C'mon Baby Tooth," Jack said as he strolled away.

They watched him walk away. And once he was out of earshot Anna tapped on the door. "He's gone Elsa."

"Oh thank goodness," Elsa said from within the locker.

"Elsa. These are my friends. Rapunzel and Merida," Anna said to the locker door.

"Nice to meet you both," Elsa said from within.

"Likewise," Rapunzel said.

"Hello," Merida said in greeting.

Finally Elsa stepped out. The girls took a good look at her, noting how she looked very much like Anna. Only paler and with a more slender face and slightly taller stature. She wore her hair up in a tight bun.

"Thank you for letting me use your locker. Jack can quite...tenacious," Elsa said as she nodded at Rapunzel in thanks.

"Oh. Uh, no problem," Rapunzel dismissed.

"So guys. This is Elsa. My big sister," Anna finally introduced. They greeted her once again.

"Hey guys. Elsa," came a voice from behind. The girls glanced back to see Hiccup standing behind them. "You guys see where Jack went?" he asked as he looked around.

"He went that way. Looking for Elsa," Anna said rolling her eyes.

Hiccup chuckled. "Can't seem to shake him, can you Elsa?"

The girls looked to Elsa, to find her facing away from Hiccup. Her hair had mysteriously come undone, flowing down over shoulder as she ran her hands over it over and over with a red face. "Mmmmhmmm," she responded quietly.

"Alright guys see you later," Hiccup said as he walked away to locate Jack.

"B-Bye," Elsa said weakly as Hiccup walked off.

The girls glanced back forth between a retreating Hiccup and a red faced Elsa.

"Anna, does Elsa-"

"Yep," Anna said with a laugh. "But Hiccup has no idea." The girls arched a brow. Wondering how Hiccup couldn't see it. It seemed fairly obvious. "He's super smart when it comes to books and stuff. But when it comes to women...he's kind stupid."

With a sigh Anna grabbed her sister by the shoulder and led her away.

"Seems like you have competition Punz," Merida said as she gave her friend a nudge. Rapunzel blushed in embarrassment.

* * *

><p>The next day was a weekend, meaning all students had the day off. And as promised Merida decided to go into town with Rapunzel. They invited Anna, who joined them since she had nothing else to do. Anna, who actually knew the city showed them around, taking them to clothing stores, showing them some local street performers, and then taking them to her favorite place, a chocolate shop.<p>

Merida and Rapunzel stared at Anna greedily devouring many chocolate candies. They began to see that Anna probably had an unhealthy obsession with chocolate. But they said nothing before leaving.

But nearly the moment they walked out they noticed two figure walk by in the distance. They stared in shock as they watched Heather and Hiccup strolling side by side through the streets. They were walking very closely, with Heather at his side, a hand wrapped around his bicep.

"Are they on a date?" Merida asked aloud.

Anna gasped dramatically and Rapunzel couldn't help but deflate in disappointment. However, intrigued they followed after the two of them. They followed them into a clothing store, hiding behind mannequins and between clothes racks as Heather picked out clothes, occasionally stopping to ask Hiccup for his opinion. After nearly 20 minutes of shopping Heather walked out with three bags which she had Hiccup carry. The young man did so without complaint.

Next they went to a small cafe with an outdoor dining section. They sat on a bench a distance away and watched as Heather and Hiccup ate. They were very curious, but they were too far to hear what they were saying.

Meanwhile, at their table.

"So, anymore stops?" Hiccup asked heather.

"What's wrong Hiccup? Aren't you having fun?"

"Being a pack mule? No, not so much," Hiccup said flatly.

Heather pouted at him. "Most guys would kill to be in my company. Snotlout and Tuffnut have come to blows many times."

"I'm not most guys," Hiccup said with a shrug.

Heather smiled at him. "I know."

"So. Are we good?"

Heather hummed as she took a sip from her cup. "Well Astrid won't be happy that I decided to suddenly not duel those two. But I can handle her," Heather said casually. She looked up at Hiccup and arched a brow. "You wouldn't happen to like either of them?"

"Nah. They're just good friends."

"Good. Because I might have changed my mind out of jealousy."

Hiccup arched a brow at her. "Are you serious?"

Heather smiled at him slyly. "I don't know. Am I?" she teased. "Well whatever. They're safe from me. Still, Astrid might decide to take matters into her own hands. Can't help you there." Hiccup nodded in understanding. "Now then. Shall we seal this deal with a kiss?"

Hiccup's face went blank in unamusement.

"Can't blame me for trying," Heather said with a sigh.

With their 'date' over the girls followed the pair back to the academy. They watched from a distance as Heather took her bags, gave Hiccup a wink and left.

The girls exchanged glances, wondering if this meant Heather and Hiccup were a couple.

* * *

><p>"Me and Heather? No," Hiccup stated firmly when they asked him at breakfast the next school day.<p>

"But we saw you the other day. You looked awfully chummy," Merida pointed out.

The girls all stared at him for an answer. Rapunzel held her breath in anticipation.

"We were just hanging out," Hiccup dismissed casually.

The girls all arched their brows at him. But Hiccup ignored them as he ate breakfast.

"So you're not going to challenge them now? Just like that?" Astrid asked in annoyance.

"Yep. Just changed my mind. Don't feel like it anymore," Heather said with a shrug.

Astrid scowled at her. "And what brought this on?"

"Nothing. You're welcome to challenge them yourself. But I'm sure Hiccup would probably just order you not to. And as the heir to your tribe you'd have to obey him. Unlike me who's not a member of the Berk tribe and therefore has no obligation to obey him."

Astrid glared at the side of her face. But Heather ignore her, one of the few people unafraid of Astrid's wrath.

Astrid silently fumed. Her plans falling through. Heather was right. Though he rarely threw his power as heir around he'd likely do it to defend a friend. And as a member of the Berk tribe Astrid was forced to obey him if he gave her an order.

She silently cursed. Glaring and scowling over at Hiccup's table.

Those two were safe...for now.

6. Chapter 6

The Quest of Fear

It was during a short intermission between classes that Hiccup was looking at the bulletin board of available quests. He ignored the looks the other students threw him as his eyes flicked around the board. Eventually one in particular caught his eyes. The villagers of a village to the west were reporting strange sighting of some kind of...creature. Some kind of dark skeletal horse that only came out at night.

The villagers were scared. The children were having nightmare. Nightmares so bad they literally could not fall asleep. Hiccup pursed his lips before glancing at Toothless perched on his shoulder.

"What do you think bud? Want to give these guys a hand?" he asked.

The dragon warbled at him before nodding with a huff. He smiled before giving him a scratch under the chin. With that decided he raised his speculum up before holding it before the bulletin board.

"Hey Hiccup!"

"Gah!" Hiccup yelped in surprise as he flinched. He looked to his left to see Rapunzel bouncing up to him with a smile while Merida slowly followed behind with a blank face. She always seemed displeased to see him.

"What you doing Hiccup?" Rapunzel asked chipperly.

Hiccup smiled at her. "Just about to take a quest," Hiccup explained as he gestured to the bulletin board, specifically the flyer of the quest he was about to accept.

"Oh?" Rapunzel asked curiously. She looked to the board and flyer. "Oh my. Those poor children," Rapunzel said with worry.

"What it is?" Merida asked as she stepped up to take a look herself.

"Yeah. I'm going to check it out. See if I can't figure out what's going on," he explained.

"Sure you can handle it E-rank?" Merida asked condescendingly. "This quest calls for at least a B-rank," Merida pointed out.

"Well yeah but-"

"Oooh. We'll come with you," Rapunzel volunteered.

"You don't really need to."

"But we're friends. And it'll be safer if we go together," Rapunzel insisted.

"But-"

"We're going lad. And you can nae stop us," Merida said with an air of finality.

Hiccup sighed. He'd much rather have gone alone. But Rapunzel's smile and Merida stubbornness made him cave.

"Ok," he said in defeat. "Just hold your Speculum up to the flyer," he said. They did as told. They watched as their mirrors glowed. Suddenly the writing on the flyer simply floated off the page before splitting into three sections and being absorbed by their mirrors.

"A notice will be sent to our teachers that will excuse us from class while we're on our quest. But we should try to finish as soon as possible so we don't miss a lot of school work. We should all go pack some stuff and meet at the headmaster's office. Got it?"

They both nodded before heading off. They grabbed extra clothes, blankets, and whatever money they still had from their previous

travels before heading to the headmaster's office. When they got there they found Hiccup waiting outside the door.

"Ready?" he asked. They nodded. "Alright. Let's go." With that he led them to the front of the school.

"So how are we going to get there Hiccup?" Rapunzel asked.

Hiccup smiled "I'm glad you asked Rapunzel." With that he pulled out some kind of glass orb from his pocket. "This magic orb will let us travel to our destination and back instantly," he revealed. They gasped in amazement as Hiccup brought the orb to his mouth, whispered something to it, and then threw it before him.

The girls yelped as with a flash of light a magic swirling circle of white light emerged before them. Hiccup glanced back at them with a grin before motioning with his head for them to follow. They obliged, stepping through the portal after him and emerging at the outskirt of the village. The girls were amazed. They must had just gone through several day's worth of travel in a mere instant.

The light vanished behind them as the portal vanished, leaving only the orb floating in mid air. Hiccup held his hand out, letting it fly into his hand. He pocketed it before leading the way to the village. As they entered they were eyes by the villagers warily. They offered them smiles and waves as they were brought before the village leader. They presented their Speculums, proof of their status as Knights. Student Knights.

They were welcomes and even offered lodging free of charge. They tried to refuse, but the villagers insisted on it as their means of paying them for their troubles. They reluctantly agreed and after setting down their things they began asking the villagers about the dark horse. The villagers shuddered and shivered at the memory of the thing. They said that it had yellow eyes and a body as black as night.

They were shown the children who'd been afflicted with nightmares. They looked awful, with dark circles under their eyes. Many of them just stumbled and trudged about.

"Maybe I can do something," Rapunzel chimed in. The villagers arched brows at her as she went to every child. She placed her hands on either side of her head and closed her eyes. Light emitted from her palms, the child stiffened before his body went slack in her arms. The villagers rushed over in worry, only to find him sound asleep.

"I used some of my magic to rejuvenate and relax his body. At least now he can get a little sleep," she said with a shrug. One by one she repeated the process, making all the children fall instantly asleep for some well needed rest. When she was done Rapunzel leaned against a wall, slightly tired from using her magic so frequently in such a short time. Merida came over to give her a hand.

"I'm going to explore the area a little. See if I can't find a clue," Hiccup said aloud.

"Oh. We'll come too," Rapunzel chimed in as she forced herself to stand. Hiccup didn't argue as the villagers led them to the edge of

the village, a spot where they'd seen the black horse. Merida inspected the ground, coming upon a set of hoofprints in the soil.

"Big hoofprints," Hiccup noted as he took a glance at them.

"Aye. And yet they aren't that deep," Merida said curiously. She looked up, glancing into the trees. "Shall we take a look? See if we can't find our black beastie?"

"Worth a look," Hiccup said with a shrug. They glanced to Rapunzel. She nodded in agreement.

Rapunzel came to Merida side, and with a golden flash she assumed her bow form. They looked to Hiccup as Toothless crawled down from Hiccup's shoulder and onto his extended arm. The girls watched curiously, having never seen Toothless change before. They stared as Toothless' wings unfurled and began to grow and expand, blocking them from view. Then they suddenly vanished, shirking and receding and leaving behind a round, silvery, and shimmering shield with Toothless' visage adorned on the front.

"Ready?" Hiccup asked as he glanced over to them. He paused as he found Merida's face blank. "What?"

"You are useless," Merida stated bluntly.

_Merida! That's rude! _Rapunzel chastised in her mind.

"It's a shield. It's not even a weapon!" Merida said in her own defense.

"Hey. Don't knock the shield. I didn't say anything about you using a bow! No offense Rapunzel," Hiccup said back.

"What are you going to do with a shield? Defend yourself till they die from exhaustion?"

"Maybe."

Merida rolled her eyes. "Whatever. Just stay behind us E-rank," Merida said with a snort as she took the lead.

They began to trek through the forest, Merida in the lead and keeping her sharp eyes out for signs of danger. Merida followed the broken twigs and footprints. An unknown amount of minutes passed as they tried to locate the black horse, until eventually they came upon a cliff face. And at the bottom they could make out a cave.

"They said it only comes out at night. Maybe this is where it hides?" Hiccup suggested. With a hum Merida gave a nod as she led the way inside the cave. Hiccup covered the rear, making sure nothing came in to try and ambush them. The cave wasn't that deep, and from the dust and cobwebs it looked as if nothing had inhabited the cave in years. They searched all over, but they found nothing of significance.

"Hmm. I didn't spy any more tracks. Where could it have gone?" Merida wondered aloud.

"Maybe we missed something," Hiccup said with a shrug. He glanced down at the ground for any signs of hoofprints or tracks, before noting something curious. He kneeled down, grabbing a fistful of dirt and letting it sift through his fingers. "Weird. Black sand," Hiccup said curiously. He didn't know what to make of it.

_Merida, I need a break. Healing all those kids really wore me out. I don't think I can maintain my form for much longer, _Rapunzel suddenly said into her partner's mind.

"C'mon Hiccup. Rapunzel needs a break. Let's head back to the village," Merida told Hiccup. Hiccup stood up after dusting his hands off and nodded at her. With that they left the cave.

Back in the cave it was dead silent. Nothing moved. Nothing but the dirt floor. Grains of black sand began to shake before shifting, rolling and converging at the center of the floor.

* * *

><p>Back at the village the sun was beginning to set. The Knights were getting in a good meal, filling their stomachs and allowing Rapunzel and Toothless to regain their strength.<p>

As they spoke they began to discuss their plans for the night.

"I guess we stand on guard. Take shifts?" Hiccup offered.

"Sounds good. You should probably go first," Merida stated.

"Why's that? Not that I mind."

"Rapunzel is going to need as much rest as she can get. She's much weaker at night. If we need to fight something we'll need her at her strongest. Seeing as you're kind of useless in battle with only a shield," Merida stated bluntly once again.

Toothless growled at her in offense.

"I know bud. She is rude," Hiccup said in agreement with Toothless. Merida ignored his comment as they continued to eat. "Alright. I'll take first watch."

With their meal concluded they all went to wash up for the night. The girls were led to the bath so they could go first. Hiccup let them as he settled in his room, getting in a quick nap since he'd have to stay up for the first part of the night. He got in about half an hour's worth before the sounds of chatter from the room next to his, the girl's room, woke him. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes as he stood and walked out into the hall. He grabbed at the girl's door and pushed it open.

"Hey guys. The sun's starting to set so why don't you guys-OH THOR!" Hiccup suddenly yelped as he threw his arm over his eyes. "I'm so sorry!"

"Just get out!" Merida cried.

"Yeah I'm out," Hiccup said as he backed out of the room and shut the door with a red face.

Merida and Rapunzel's faces were red as they had their arms crossed over their chests in embarrassment. They weren't naked. But they still didn't want to be seen in their underwear.

Hiccup tapped on the wall from his room. "Guys? Can you hear me? I'm sorry," Hiccup said through the wall.
"Sorry...sorry...sorry...sorry...so sorry," Hiccup kept muttering.

"It's ok Hiccup," Rapunzel assured him. "It was an accident. No harm done."

"Like hell! Next time I see you E-rank ah'm going to punch you in your face!" Merida snarled at him.

"Fair enough," Hiccup called back. "Goodnight."

As the girls got ready for bed Merida was still angry. Rapunzel tried to calm her down, and succeeded with limited success before they both went to bed. As the night went on and the sun went down Hiccup grabbed a lantern and Toothless changed to hsi shield form. Hiccup began to patrol the streets of the village for, making his way to every part of the village for any sign of the black horse.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile, on the outskirts of the village a black figure moved through the woods. One minute it was there, then it was gone. Then it'd reappear in another spot, gradually moving closer and closer to the village. It stopped at the very edge. Pausing at it sensed the sleeping children, having dreams, sleeping soundly. Completely unaware of what lurked in the shadows outside their village.<p>

It also sense some new people. Young ones at that.

It was time to feast.

Time to harvest their fear.

* * *

><p>new chap

7. Chapter 7

Quest Completed

An hour had passed into Hiccup's patrol of the town. So far, nothing. He kept a close eye on the village borders, peering out into the distance for any signs of the black horse. But he'd turned up nothing all this time. He released a yawn, his shift on watch coming to a close not soon enough. He passed through the village square and took a seat on a bench to rest his legs a bit.

"Nothing bud. Maybe the black horse left?" Hiccup said to his partner. He heard Toothless' growl in his mind. "Yeah, who knows?" he said with a shrug. He sighed as he sagged his shoulders and listened to the stillness of the night. The only sounds the sounds of crickets

chirping, an owl hooting in the distance, and a nightly breeze blowing through the town.

And with that breeze came absolute silence. Hiccup perked up, on edge and alert as the surrounding noises had gone quiet. Too quiet. Toothless let out a growl into his partner's mind in warning.

"Yeah bud. I noticed," Hiccup whispered as a chill ran up his spine. The only thing disturbing the silence was the wind.

And carried unseen on that wind was black sand. Swirling and dancing aloft as it searched for it's quarry. Soon enough it found it. The sand streamed together out of the air and down, filtering through the cracks of a window where it found two girls sleeping, having dreams.

Dreams it had yet to taste before, dreams that it could twist with fear until they became nightmares.

The sand began to converge on the center of the room before taking shape, rising higher and higher to fill up the space between the two girls' beds. When it was finished there stood a large black horse, black as night with burning amber eyes, and sharp, skeletal features.

It's head shifted back and forth between the resting girls before the darkness which created began to seep out, reaching toward the girl's with black tendrils. The tendrils settled on their heads as it began to feast on their dreams.

Rapunzel sat up in bed with a gasp. Her pleasant dream of painting and baking had suddenly...fallen away. She rubbed her head before looking around the room. She found it strangely dark. So dark she couldn't even see her hand in front of her face.

"Merida?" she called out softly. She got no response. "Merida?" she said a little louder. She swallowed as she threw back her blankets and swung her legs out of bed. Her feet made contact with the ground, eliciting a startled yelp at the ice cold feeling of a stone floor hitting her bare soles.

Rapunzel stared at the unseen floor in confusion. The floor of their room was made of wood.

"Merida?" Rapunzel called out again before she stood up. She peered into the dark where Merida's bed should have been. Only to find nothing there. Her mind began to reel in confusion before light began to filter in and illuminate her surroundings. Rapunzel glanced around and froze, stomach dropping in dread and disbelief as she recognized where was.

Back in her tower.

"Nononononononononononono!" Rapunzel muttered in panic. Her hands flew up to her hair, grabbing two fistfuls of hair. "NO! I can't be here! I'm out!" she screamed. She ran down the stairs where she knew the window was. She didn't know what was going on. But she sure as hell wasn't going to stay here. She went straight for the window, intent on climbing out.

The window was open and she could see the outside, her freedom, and escape. But before she could reach it the wooden window slammed shut. She reached it, pushing against it with all her might. She eventually resorted to banging on it, trying desperately to get it open. Her breathing started to become rapid, she turned, only to see the wall slowly creeping in on her. Her panic grew, her lungs seemed unable to keep air.

"Let me out! LET ME OUT!" Rapunzel screamed. "Merida! Merida!"

Meanwhile, the red head tossed and turned in her beds, trapped in a nightmare from which she couldn't escape.

The black horse was relishing their distress, their fear. Devouring it, making itself stronger as it trapped the girls in their own minds. It woud keep feasting and feasting until...

Suddenly the door to the room burst open as Hiccup rushed in. The dark horse reared up in surprise, throwing its legs out. Hiccup raised his shield up, blocking the sharp hooves as they struck the surface of his shield. With a grunt Hiccup shoved the horsed back. As it fell, dropping it's feet back onto the wooden floor Hiccup struck it across the face. Then he struck it from the others side, forcing it back and toward the window. As the horse reared up Hiccup slid under it, raising his shield and placing it on it's belly before pushing it upward and out the window.

Hiccup looked down to see the horse thrashing on the ground as it attempted to pick itself up. As it was doing so Hiccup checked on his comrades. He grabbed Rapunzel by the shoulders and shook her.

"Rapunzel, wake up!" Hiccup said loudly. Rapunzel's eyes fluttered before snapping open, only to be met with Hiccup's face a few inches from her own.

She immediately turned a red. "Eep!" she squeaked as she scooted away from him.

"You ok?" Hiccup asked quickly. She nodded, still red faced. "Good. Our black horse is here. Wake Merida," he told her before he went to the window and leapt out. He landed, spying the dark horse retreating into the distance. Hiccup narrowed his eyes and pointed the face of his shield at it, from center a length of rope fired out before snaking around its neck.

"Gotcha," Hiccup muttered triumphantly. He yelped as the rope went taught and he was suddenly yanked off his feet. He'd misjudged its strength. He got a face and mouthful of dirt as it began dragging him through the town. It took a sharp left, causing Hiccup to slide before slamming into the side of a building.

"Well this is embarrassing," Hiccup said to himself as he was being pulled through the town. With a huff he he pulled on the shield and managed to get his feet under him. He dug his heels into the dirt and tugged hard, slowing the racing horse down until it stopped. "You aren't going anywhere."

"Let's reel it in bud," Hiccup muttered lowly. He heard a growl in

his mind as the length of rope coming from the shield began to retract back into it, slowing pulled the horse back as Knight and Implement refused to let it get away. The black horse tried to flee, digging it's hooves into the ground, but being pulled back anyway.

Finally it realized it was fighting a losing battle, and so it turned it's head to face down the Knight. It snorted, eyes narrowing into a glare before it's loosened the sand making up its body, allowing the rope binding it to pass through it's neck. The roped retracted fully back into the shield as Hiccup's eyes widened in surprise.

The horse tensed before charging Hiccup at full speed. Hiccup narrowed his eyes and planted his feet while cocking back his shield arm. He waited and waited as the horse advanced, hooves thundering against the ground as it closed in. As it came within striking distance Hiccup swung, catching the horse on the side of the head with enough force to knock it off its feet. It hit the ground hard, sliding and rolling across the ground before coming to a stop. It stopped on its back, legs kicking at the air as it attempted to right itself.

Meanwhile Hiccup charged it while it was attempting to recover. As he closed the distance he leapt into the air above it, shield poised to strike. As he brought it down the horse suddenly broke apart, breaking into sand and reforming a distance away as Hiccup's shield slammed against the ground where it had been.

Hiccup frowned before standing up and facing the reformed black horse. The horse scraped a hoof against the ground, shaking it's head and snorting at him in agitation.

"That's annoying," Hiccup muttered quietly. He heard Toothless growl in his mind. "I know bud. But I don't want to burn the village down," Hiccup said as his eyes flicked around at all the houses in close proximity. "We need to drive it out of the village," he said to himself and his partner.

The black horse tensed to charge at him again. Hiccup raised his shield up in preparation as it finally charged, hoof digging into the ground and kicking up dirt. But as it was closing the distance a golden flash of light suddenly struck it in the front leg, it went tumbling, breaking apart and reforming. But as it stood up it did so with a noticeable limp, keeping the struck leg elevated ever so slightly.

Hiccup looked to see Merida trotting up to him, golden bow in hand. She strode up to stand in front of him. "Just stand back E-rank. We'll handle this," she said confidentally. She quickly raised her bow up and fired at the horse. As the arrow was dead on to hit it the horse split apart, turning into a cloud of sand before quickly moving away and out of the city.

Merida growled angrily. "It's getting away!" she shouted as she took off after it.

"Merida hold on!" Hiccup shouted after her. He sighed and shook his head. That girl was frustrating. "Alright bud let's get after them."

* * *

><p>Merida chased the cloud of sand through the dark forest, determined to not let it get away. But the thing was damn fast, streaming through trees and foliage. Eventually she came to a stop as she lost track of it. She cursed angrily, turning in a circle as she searched for any sign of it.<p>

See it? Rapunzel asked in her mind.

"Nay," she said with an angry breath. Rapunzel's form suddenly gave a flash. She looked down. "Rapunzel, are you almost out of magic?" she asked in surprise. Rapunzel form began to flash faster.

Um...maybe, Rapunzel replied sheepishly.

"How can you be out of energy this quickly. Even if it's night time you should be able to hold your form for a few hours," Merida reminded her as if the knowledge would change anything.

It was that horse, Rapunzel replied. It did something to me. It felt like as if it drained me, she said in her defence.

"Damn it," Merida muttered in frustration. She suddenly heard a twig snap. She supressed a curse as she turned around, making out a black shape among the trees. She lifted her bow and pulled back on the draw string. An arrow of light began to form, but before she cuold let it loose it vanished.

Rapunzel's weapon form gave off a final flash of light before Rapunzel fell on top of Merida in her human form. The girl's looked at each other in panic, essentially unarmed before leaping to their feet and looking into the trees. The black shape moved, getting closer to them. Rapunzel let out an eep as she ducked behind Merida, clutching her arm in fear.

Merida stood her ground, drawing a small dagger hidden in her boot. She narrowed her eyes before slowly backing away. As a Knight Merida could hold her own physically if she had to. But Rapunzel was vulnerable. While the girl was quite athletic in her own right she was no match for a monster.

The black thing suddenly stepped into the open. And as Merida got a glimpse at it she froze. The thing had taken on a different form. A form that walked on two legs and towered over them. Merida dropped her arm, staring at the one thing she feared. The dagger in her hand fell to the ground.

"Merida," Rapunzel whispered as she shook her arm. The red head didn't respond, still frozen in fear. "Merida we need to run! Merida! What's wrong?" she asked. She'd never seen Merida like this. They'd faced many things on their travels and Merida had always face them head on.

The thing took a step closer, and then another, and another. Rapunzel grabbed Merida's hand before dragging her away as fast as she could. The black creature stared after them, feasting on the red head's fear as it began to grow in size and bulk. It was about to give chase, not wanting to let it's meal escape just yet, intent on hunting them and keeping their fear incited before a shadow passed overhead.

It looked up to see as something flew over its head. It heard something hit the ground behind it, and it whirled around to face it as a result.

The only thing it saw were flames.

* * *

><p>"Merida! Snap out of it! Merida!" Rapunzel shouted in her friend's face. The red head remained stock still, eyes wide and glazed over. With no other idea Rapunzel swiftly slapped her across the face.<p>

"Ow!" Merida cried as she snapped from her trance. She placed a hand over her cheek. "The hell Rapunzel?" she cried indignantly.

"Well you were frozen solid!" Rapunzel said in her defense.

"What? No I wasn't," Merida replied hotly.

"It doesn't matter. We need to regroup with Hic-"

As Rapunzel was expressing her interest in regrouping with Hiccup light and heat suddenly radiated through the trees. The girls shouted in alarm, shielding their eyes in from the suddenly flash. When it subsided they could smell burnt wood and earth. They exhcanged a glance before they began to make their way toward it.

They eventually found themselve where they'd been moments ago. Save the trees and ground around them were scorched black. And even stranger still there was a black figure standing in the center of them. The girls inched closer to the standing black shape, finding it to be a statue made of black glass.

"What the heck?" Merida whispered in confusion. She reached a hand out to touch it when they heard a rustle in the trees.

"Oh hey! There you guys are!" The girls glanced to the side to see Hiccup emerging from the tree line, shield still strapped to his arm. "Well that's weird," he said as he made his way up to the black glass statue.

"Aye. What did this?" Merida said in confusion.

"It's a mystery. I guess we'll never know," Hiccup said with a shrug. He raised his shield arm up and swung it hard. The girls leapt back with a yelp as the statue shattered, breaking away into pieces. "It's dead now. Mission accomplished," he said with a smile.

He looked to the girls. "Shall we head back?" The girls nodded as they followed him back to the village. But as they did they looked back, still wondering what had blackened the area.

* * *

><p>The trio stepped through the portal, arriving back at school in the early afternoon the next day. They happily told the villagers that the black horse was dead. But if the problems persisted they could contact the academy or the official knights of the

kingdom.<p>

As they walked back into school they were greeted by Anna and Jack.

"Hey guys! You're back!" Anna said cheerfully.

"Hey guys. Quest go ok?" Jack asked.

"Yeah. I got to go report to North and return the travel globe," Hiccup said. He looked to the girls. "You guys can go unpack and relax," he told them. They nodded before he made his way to the headmaster's office.

"So what was it?" Anna asked curiously.

"I don't ken. Some kind of...creature made of sand," Merida told them.

"Weird," Jack said rubbing his chin. "Well you guys got it, so I guess that's all that matters," he said with a shrug.

* * *

><p>Inside the headmaster's office Hiccup placed the travel globe into the headmasters desk and reported on their quest. He couldn't help but notice how the headmaster's eyes seemed to narrow in anger at the mention of the sand creature.<p>

"That will be all Hiccup," North said to dismiss him.

"Yes sir," Hiccup said respectfully before leaving.

North let out a breath in his office, wondering if this new development meant what he thought it did. He hoped that if it did the children at the school would be prepared to face it.

* * *

><p>new chap. sorry for the wait

8. Chapter 8

The Sister

It was another day at the academy, the kids were in gym class. They were currently gathered around, watching a duel between an A-ranked student from a higher class, and Jack. Merida and Rapunzel watched in quiet surprise as Jack dominated the A-ranked knight. All while laughing and cackling away.

The A-ranked knight was a brawny bow with a shaved head, his partner and weapon had taken the form of a large spiked mace. Each of his blows were powerful, capable of shattering limbs with a single swing. And Jack avoided every one like it were nothing.

"C'mon chrome dome," Jack taunted as he simply leaned back to avoid the mace. His opponent growled in frustration, swinging harder and harder in an attempt to hit him. He aimed low, swinging for Jack's

legs. Jack leapt over, placing a foot on the other man's head and leaping into the air. The man turned around to swing at him, only to find him nowhere in sight.

"Hey! You get back in the fight Jack!" Aster called out, looking upward to see Jack floating in the air, laying back on his staff with his arms crossed behind his head and cloud gazing.

"But it's such a beautiful day," Jack replied smugly, not at all taking his duel seriously.

The man snarled before leaping up, leaping the white haired boy and lifting his mace above his head to deliver a powerful downward swing. Jack saw the man coming for him and smirked. He waved his hand around, and in the next moment he was holding a fluffy white snowball. He tossed it at the man's face, blinding him. Jack simply rolled out of the way in midair as the man fell to the ground.

He wiped at his eyes before standing up, only for Jack to place a foot on his hand as he used him like a perch. "You kind of suck at this," Jack taunted. "Nice view," Jack said as he smiled at the girls and gave them a wink. The man swung his mace upward. Jack flipped over his swing, and as he did he hooked the end of his staff under the man's shirt. Everyone watched as Jack swung the man into the air with incredible strenght before slamming him into the ground with enough force to scatter up dirt and dust.

When it cleared they saw the knight was unconcious.

"C'mon Aster. Give me a challenge next time," Jack said as he dusted some invisible dirt of his shirt.

"Yeah yeah. Good job Jack. Thats another victory against an A-rank knight. So I officially promote you-"

"Pass!" Jack declared.

"Oh come on Jackie!" Aster said in exapseration. "You're obviously above the level of a C-ranked knight. Just take the dang-"

"Pass!" Jack repeated, starting an argument between Jack and Aster once again.

* * *

><p>"You're pretty good," Merida complimented at lunch.<p>

"I know," Jack said casually.

"Look at this guy, so humble," Hiccup said beside him sarcastically.

"Why don't you increase your rank Jack? I mean you beat A-ranks." Rapunzel asked curiously, he obviously had the skill.

"Cuz I don't want a target on my back," Jack stated. "Once you get a higher rank everyone wants to take a shot at you. If I stay a C-rank there's nothing to gain from dueling me," he said with a shrug.

"Speaking of A-rank," Merida said as she looked to Anna. The strawberry blonde perked up. "How come Elsa doesn't sit with us?"

"Yeah. I'm really curious about that too," Jack said as he looked to Anna with a grin.

"Elsa is..." Anna paused, looking for the right words. "Just shy," Anna said. The other hummed, taking her answer before resuming their meals.

Anna didn't say that Elsa didn't want to sit with them due to her stalker and the object of her affections sitting at the same table. Anna pursed her lips all the way back to her room at the end of classes. When she entered she and her sister's shared room she was met with the sight of her sister, sitting at her small work desk as she studied.

Like she always did.

"Hey Elsa," Anna greeted.

"Hello Anna," Elsa greeted back, keeping her attention on her book.

Anna changed out of her school uniform, slipping into some shorts and a loose shirt. She jumped onto her bed with a sigh before looking to her older sister.

"Hey Elsa. Want to join us for lunch tomorrow?"

"No thank you," Elsa replied in rejection.

"Oh come on!" Anna whined. "Will you please sit with us! Please! Please! Please!" Anna begged. Elsa ignored her, prompting Anna to leap up and rush to her. She threw her arms around he so she couldn't escape. "Please! Please! Please!" she urged.

"Anna! I'm trying to study!" Elsa said as she tried to shake Anna's arms off her.

"Please! Please! Please!" Anna continued.

"Ok!" Elsa finally said. Anna loosened her hold. "I'll think about it," Elsa said. Anna squealed, giving her a hug before she flopped over onto her bed.

"You should study Anna," Elsa told her.

"Nah."

Anna was dissapointed the next day as her sister was nowhere in sight during lunch. She was in a foul mood, frowing and pushing her food around. At the end of the day she headed to the library, where she knew she'd find her sister. And sure enough, she was there. Sitting at a table with a book open.

Anna frowned as she came to sit across from her.

"Anna," Elsa greeted.

"Elsa," Anna said back displeased. "I thought you said you'd join us at lunch today."

"I'd said I'd think about it. I did. And I decided I didn't want to go," Elsa stated matter of factly.

Anna sighed. "C'mon Elsa. I know the reason you don't want to sit with us."

"Yes, because Jack's constant advances border on harrassment," Elsa stated, annoyed.

"Or it's because a certain tall, broad shouldered, auburn haired, and green eyed-"

"Anna!" Elsa choked out. Anna smirked, Elsa's calm and cool facade melted away by the mere mention of Hiccup. Elsa was red, from her neck to her cheeks. Elsa swallowed before taking a breath and composing herself. "I have no idea what you mean."

"I mean, that you like Hiccup," Anna said with a teasing grin.

"I do not," Elsa said back, unable to meet her sister's eyes.

"Yes you do. You get all red at the mention of his name. And when he's around you can't even look at him," Anna reminded her.

"I do not," Elsa stated as she stood up, grabbing her book and walking away. Anna stood up and followed after her as she walked past the aisles of books.

"You do," Anna said from behind.

"I don't."

"You do!"

"I don't!

"Yooooouuuuu...do!"

Elsa whirled around, patience with her sister at her limit. "For the last time Anna. I do not like Hiccup! At all!" Anna's eyes were wide as she leaned slightly back in shock that her sister had raised her voice so.

"Ouch," came a voice that made both girl flinch and freeze up. They slowly craned their heads, finding Hiccup standing between a row of book shelves. He was frowning slightly as he looked at Elsa. "I mean I know we're not exactly friends, but I always thought we got along ok," he said in confusion.

Elsa's face began to heat up. Soon her cheeks were inflamed and her entire face was red. Anna looked at her sister in concen, noticing her eyes beginning to water ever so slightly.

"Elsa-" was all she could get out before Elsa ducked her head and walked briskly away in utter mortification and embarrassment, clutching her book to her chest. "Oh boy," Anna said to herself. She

looked to Hiccup to find him still standing there.

"Elsa doesn't dislike you by the way. It was just a joke. She's silly like that. Such a kidder," Anna said with a chuckle before quickly shuffling away.

Hiccup stared after her, cocking a brow. "I don't get it."

* * *

><p>Anna immidiately went back to her room, finding her sister tucked under her blankets and curled up into a ball.<p>

"Elsa. It's ok," Anna said to her softly. She sat on her bed, heart sinking as Elsa curled up into a tighter ball. "I'm sorry Elsa. I didn't know Hiccup was there."

"I just told Hiccup I hated him!" Elsa said with a sniffle.

"Yeah. That sounded kind of bad," Anna admitted. Elsa whimpered. "But you can fix it. Hiccup likes you...as a person at least."

Elsa remained silent before slowly uncurling from her ball. "He does?" she asked quietly as she peeked out from underneath her blanket.

"Yeah. Just tell him you were joking."

"Joking?"

"Yeah. You know. 'Ha, just kidding! I don't _really_ hate you'," she tried to say in demonstration.

Elsa looked down, unsure. She didn't necessarily want to start a relationship with Hiccup at this moment. But she at least wanted him to know she didn't hate him.

"You think that could work?"

"Yeah," Anna said with a nod. "Now we just need to get you and Hiccup alone so you could talk."

* * *

><p>The next day Hiccup was at his locker, gathering his books for his classes. Toothless sat on top of the row of lockers, patiently waiting for his human to gather his things. Then from the other side of Hiccup's locker someone approached. Toothless gave a huff to alert Hiccup, causing him to look up. When hehad his attention he flicked his eyes to the side, motioning to something just behind his locker door.<p>

Hiccup closed his locker and found Elsa standing beside him. "Oh hey Elsa," he greeted casually.

Elsa took a breath, looking into his green eyes and then freezing up. She looked away, fiddling with the braid falling down her shoulder nervously.

"Hello Hiccup," she said after swallowing thickly.

"So what's up? Still hate me?" he joked with a smile.

"I don't hate you," she said quickly. "I was just joking around...ha ha," she said with a fake and weak laugh. "But in all honestly-"

"Elsa!" Jack suddenly cut in as he threw an arm over Hiccup's shoulder. "Hello my little snow angel. How are you this lovely day?" he asked as he threw her a charming smile.

Elsa frowned at the unwanted interruption. Luckily, she had backup.

Jack was suddenly tugged away from Hiccup. "Jack!" Anna greeted as she held onto his shoulder tightly. "There's something I need your help with. That's not here," she said as she began dragging him away.

"Oh uh, ok?" Jack said in confusion. "Later Hic. Gorgerous!" he called back.

"He's really annoying isn't he?" Hiccup asked as he looked to Elsa.

"Definitely," she said back with a small smile.

"So? What were you about to say?" Hiccup asked her.

"Oh...umm..."

"I like your hair like that by the way," Hiccup said casually.

Elsa flinched, cheeks beginning to pinken. "Thank you. I was...just wondering..." she paused to swallow. "If I could join you for lunch..." she finished. Her eyes widened in self shock, no clue where that'd come from.

"Don't you normally eat in the library?" he asked.

"I do...but I thought I'd like to join you guys," she said quietly.

"Yeah. I don't see why not," Hiccup said with a shrug. "Class is about to start, shall we go together?" he offered.

"Sure," she said with a nod.

They walked side by side, Elsa still slightly red. "You prepared for that test today in politics and law?"

"Quite, if I do say so myself."

At lunch, to everyone's surprise, and Anna happiness, Elsa joined them.

* * *

><p>After school and during Baking Club the girls spoke about

Elsa.<p>

"I like her," Rapunzel said.

"Me too," Merida agreed with a nod.

"I'm glad."

"She obviously likes Hiccup still," Merida whispered.

"Yeah...Hiccup seems friendly with her too I guess," Rapunzel said blankly.

"Yeah. It's good that they get along so well," Anna began casually.

"Why's that?" Merida asked.

"Since they might get married one day," Anna finished without thinking.

"What?!" Rapunzel and Merida asked at the same time.

"Oops," Anna said as she realized her mistake.

"What do you mean they might get married one day?" Merida asked curiously.

Anna fidgeted nervously. "Well, Elsa, Hiccup, and I are all not from this kingdom. We all come from the northern regions bodering this one. We share our borders with the northern tribes, including Berk," Anna explained.

"Elsa's and my kindgom has been allies with this one for a long time. Berk has only just recently become allies. There are talks, rumors going around that to ensure peace between the northern tribes and this kingdom a polotical marriage might be formed between a noble born of the northern tribes and my kindgom," she explained.

"You and Elsa are both noble born?" Merida asked in surprise. Anna nodded in embarassment.

"Elsa is supposedly being considered to be part of this political marriage. And Berk is the most powerful of the northen tribes, meaning Hiccup, as the future heir, is also likely to be considered."

"Wow," Rapunzel said as she absorbed all this information.

"So yeah," Anna said with a shrug.

"Only time will tell."

* * *

><p>Elsa centric chapter since everyone wants to see her

9. Chapter 9

Curiousity

Rapunzel sighed in contentment as she enjoyed the public baths the school had to offer. While every room had a small bathroom the public baths were a place for the students to mingle, lounge, and relax. She sat beside Merida and Anna water just above her chest. She'd originally been ogled for her freakishly long hair, but soon the other girls ignored her in favor of the water and pleasant atmosphere. All around their classmates were also present, enjoying the water and making idle chatter.

"Thanks for inviting us Anna. This was a great idea," Rapunzel said to her friend.

Anna smiled at her. "No problem. Elsa never wants to go with me. So i'm glad you accepted." Rapunzel smiled before leaning back, letting the warm water relax her muscles.

Merida sat in silence, also enjoying the water and her friends' company. But as she did she felt eyes on her. She looked around, eventually meeting another pair of blue eyes. She found Astrid glaring at her from across the large pool of water. She narrowed her eyes, glaring right back. She hadn't known what she'd done to ear the girl's animosity, but she wasn't going to take it lying down.

Their stare down was ended as Heather said something to grab Astrid's attention, making her look away. With a huff Merida diverted her attention off the blonde, sinking down into the water leisurely. Steam rose from the water, covering the whole room in a light misty veil. Merida ducked her head under the water, holding her breath and listening to the muffled noise around her.

And then the background noise was interrupted by the sound of breaking glass followed by a splash. All the girls looked up to see the glass window on the ceiling had broken, almost as if something had come in.

In one voice nearly every female in the room shouted a name. "JACK!"

"I regret nothing!" came a familiar voice from somewhere outside, likely the roof, that was retreating into the distance.

"Ugh. He never learns. North is going to make him clean out the stables again," Anna said shaking her head.

"What an arse," Merida muttered. With grumbles the girls began getting out of the water, no longer able to enjoy their bath with a gaping hole in the ceiling. "Let's get out then," Merida said as she and Anna climbed out of the water. They stared, waiting for Rapunzel to join them, only to find the girl more flushed than normal and sitting very stiffly.

"Aren't you coming Punz?" Merida asked.

"In a bit," Rapunzel stammered out awkwardly. "I want to enjoy the water a bit more," she said quickly before they could ask her why.

Anna and Merida shrugged as they turned and left, followed one by one by every other girl until only Rapunzel remained. When everyone was gone she looked around the room to make sure the coast was clear. "You can come out now," she whispered lowly. A figure rose out of the water, form covered by her hair. Then it began to throw it off, revealing Hiccup, drenched and with water up to his waist.

"Thank you Rapunzel. I swear this isn't what it looks like," Hiccup said as he faced away from her. He'd fallen into the bath from the ceiling, and hoping Rapunzel would be the least likely girl to murder him he swam up to her, hoping to hide beneath her mass of hair.

"No problem Hiccup," Rapunzel muttered out awkwardly. She stiffly stood up, collecting her hair and using it to wrap her body before she quickly shuffled out of the bath. When she was gone Hiccup sighed, feeling like a pervert even though this really wasn't his fault.

He got out of the water and made his way to the door and before he could reach out it opened to reveal headmaster North. The headmaster stared down at Hiccup, brow raised.

"Jack," Hiccup said to explain it all.

"Ah. I see. Off to bed then," North said as he stepped aside to let Hiccup leave. The auburn haired young man did so, sloshing down the halls and back to his room where he planned to commit a murder.

* * *

><p>The next day Hiccup dropped down onto his knees in front of Rapunzel and begged for forgiveness. The other girls watched on in confusion, wondering what exactly Hiccup was asking forgiveness for.<p>

"It's ok Hiccup," Rapunzel whispered with a blush.

"No it's not. I owe you one now. I'll do anything to make it up to you. Just name it."

"Anything?" Rapunzel asked curiously.

"Yes," Hiccup said looking up.

Rapunzel hummed, fiddling with her hands and flushing a an idea came to mind. "I don't know the city that well. How about you show me around tomorrow?" she offered

Hiccup looked up to see if she was serious. "Uh...yeah. Ok."

Rapunzel suppressed a squeal as they made the arrangements to meet up. That whole day Rapunzel had a smile on her face as she anticipated the next day.

She was going on her first ever date!

Anna helped her prepare that night, bringing over and lending her some nicer clothes since Rapunzel really didn't have any. Merida sat idly back on her bed, uninterested in the whole affair. Dates were

pointless. And her best friend could do better than...the E-rank. But she kept her mouth shut, occasionally smiling and nodding in approval when Rapunzel asked her opinion on a outfit.

Soon they picked out something nice for her.

Rapunzel went to sleep buzzing with energy as she excitedly awaited for the morning.

* * *

><p>Rapunzel's mood was slightly sour as she was met with an unwanted development. Jack wanted to tag along. And not wanting to be outnumbered she decided to ask Merida and Anna to join them. Anna shook her head, muttering 'idiot' under her breath at Hiccup as they headed toward the city.<p>

They walked around, first stopping by an art store. Rapunzel smiled gleefully as she looked over all the paints and brushes.

"You like art Rapunzel?" Hiccup asked as he came to stand beside her at a rack of brushes.

"Oh I love art. I used to paint my to-barn!" Rapunzel corrected quickly. "My barn back at home," she lied. She and Merida's story was that they were farmer's daughters.

"Really?" Hiccup said curiously. He hummed, reaching a hand out and grabbing a brush before taking a hold of Rapunzel wrist. Rapunzel stiffened at the contact, hoping her palms weren't sweating as he raised her hand and placed a brush into it. "Try this one. Good quality," he said as he let her wrist go. She smiled in appreciation as she looked the brush over.

"I like art too," Hiccup added.

"Really?"

"I like to sketch. But I dabble with paints every now and then," Hiccup said casually.

Rapunzel smiled at him, heart thrumming as she recognized a good sign.

A shared interest.

The girls pretended to be looking at art supplies while they flicked their gazed to Rapunzel and Hiccup. They found Rapunzel smiling wide at him as they spoke back and forth. They assumed this was a good sign.

"So," Jack said as he came to stand beside them. The girls stiffened up before looking at him. "Does Rapunzel like Hiccup? Was this supposed to be a date?" he asked curiously. Their flinches gave him his answer.

"Ah. Sorry guys. If I'd known I wouldn't have tagged along," he said bashfully. "Dude is seriously dense," Jack said with a snort as he looked at the back of Hiccup's head.

"It's ok I guess. Seems to be going well," Anna said as she motioned to the two of them who continued to talk about art.

"Well she does have an advantage already. Hiccup likes blondes," Jack stated.

"If you want I could show you some of my sketches," Hiccup offered Rapunzel.

"Oooh I'd love that!" she said with a nod.

After that the group left, since it was too late to leave without some strange excuse the others decided to stay with Hiccup and Rapunzel and just have a group outing. Rapunzel stayed by Hiccup, trying to learn more about him. Hiccup answered her questions openly and honestly, unlike her.

"So you and Merida are from the same village?" he asked out of the blue.

"Yes," Rapunzel answered shortly. Hiccup hummed in reply, eyes flicking to the red head.

"So you just decided to become Knights one day?" he pressed.

"Uh, yeah. More or less," she said with an awkward chuckle. Hiccup hummed again. Rapunzel swallowed as Hiccup looked intently at her, almost like he were trying to put a puzzle together. But he said nothing as he gave her a smile and they continued on their outing.

Anna and Rapunzel excitedly led everyone into a clothing store. They browsed while Jack, Hiccup, and Merida stood back patiently.

"Not much of a shopper?" Hiccup asked her.

"Nay," Merida said with a shake of her head.

The girls didn't end up buying anything so they left, making a few more stops at some local sights of noteworthiness and a cafe before they decided to head back up to the school. When they reached the school they began to go their seperate way, though Hiccup and Rapunzel paused to speak one final time.

"Thank you Hiccup. I had a nice time," Rapunzel said sincerely.

"I owed you one," he said with a shrug. Rapunzel's shoulder couldn't help but droop in dissapoitment that he'd only seen their date as a means to pay off a debt. "But I had a good time too," he admitted with a nod. That got Rapunzel to smile again.

"I'll show my sketchbook soon. Deal?" he offered. Rapunzel happily agreed before they went their seperate way. Rapunzel skipped merrily away, thinking her first date had gone pretty well. She'd learned just a bit more about her crush and they seemed to even have a few things in common.

She skipped up to her friends, who chuckled at the sight of her happy self before making their way back to their rooms.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Hiccup and Jack were settling in. Hiccup was feeding Toothless as he pondered all he'd learned from Rapunzel and what he'd already known.<p>

"Hey Jack, what do you think of Merida and Rapunzel?" he asked his friend.

"They seem cool. Why?" Jack asked curiously as he stroked Baby Tooth with his finger.

"They said they're farmers' daughters...I don't believe that," he said seriously.

"Why not?" Jack asked, truly curious.

"I got a look at Rapunzel's hands today. They don't look like the hands of a farmer," Hiccup said as he remembered seeing looking her palms over when he placed the brush into her hand. "She also said she and Merida are from the same village. But Merida's accent in completely different."

"Maybe her family moved from another region. Couln't be lots of explanations," Jack countered.

"Then there's Merida," Hiccup continued. "Her attitude isn't at all what you'd expect from a farmer's daughter."

"What do you mean?"

"She's too...proud. We have noble borns here, yet she acts as if she's one of them. It's strange."

"You don't exactly act like your people Hiccup," Jack reminded him.

"Fair point," Hiccup relented. "Still. I think they're lying to us."

"So what if they are. It's not our business to pry into their personal lives. Maybe they have their reasons."

"You don't want to know why?"

Jack let out a sigh as he laid back, crossing his arms behind his head to stare at the cieling. "Well now that you got me thinking about it. A little," Jack admitted. He suddenly smirked to himself. "I bet you could find out from Rapunzel very easily," he teased.

"Why do you say that?"

"Wow. You know what you do have in common with your people Hic? A thick skull," Jack said with a snort at his obliviousness.

"What are you talking about?"

"Exactly," Jack said as his friend only proved his point.

Hiccup frowned, not knowing what Jack was talking about. But he didn't dwell on it as he thought back to his new friends. They weren't what they seemed. He was sure they were hiding something. Their origins were a mystery, one he suddenly wanted to solve.

And if Hiccup was anything, it was curious.

Curious and stubborn.

10. Chapter 10

Sobered

A village to the west had been plagued by the sudden and mysterious appearance of a monster in their local quarren. The quarren was important to the village, as the stones coming from it were used commonly in the construction of their town. Without delay they sent out a notice calling for assistance by the kingdom's student knights. And the first to respond had been some students from the academy.

Currently said monster was chasing one of them through the forest.

It was Hiccup. He ran for dear life as the large rock monster pursed, knocking trees over as it stomped after him. The plan had been to lure it out of the quarren and to an open field where he hoped his backup could get a clear shot at it. He'd originally been planning on coming alone, but unfortunately a certain blonde and her redheaded partner decided to join him, fearful that he would be out of his league as the mission called for an A-rank.

Hiccup finally cleared the tree line, shield on his arm as he frantically dashed to the field's center. He stopped and turned as the golem knocked over the last few trees and chased him to the center. So far so good.

"Ok guys!" he called out. He got no response as the golem kept coming. "Guys!" he shouted again as he looked around. He found Merida, leaning against a tree at the right of the field, smirking at him with Rapunzel's bow form in hand.

"What are you waiting for! Shoot it!" he shouted as it drew closer.

"Say please!" Merida called back with a grin.

"Are you-" he paused and yelped as he ducked a swing from a stony fist. "Crazy!?"

"That's not very nice, especially after Rapunzel and I came all this way to help you like any good friend would!" Merida called back as Hiccup weaved and rolled to avoid being hit.

Merida I really think we should help him, Rapunzel said in her mind, slightly worried.

"Nah. He's fine," Merida said casually as Hiccup dodged every attack. "Besides. He needs a little practice since he never fights."

Hiccup cried out in alarm as he ran away from the stomping golem. He jumped to the left as it attempted to smash him with an arm. Then he leapt over it as it dragged its arm across the ground. Parts of it's rocky body began flying at him. He raised his shield up and blocked.

"OK! Please help!" Hiccup called out frantically.

"Sorry! Didn't catch that!"

"For the love of Odin woman! Shoot the damn thing!" Hiccup cried.

Merida smirked in satisfaction. "Rapunzel. Long bow," she said to her partner. Rapunzel's form began to glow as the bow began to lengthen, extending from both ends until it was nearly the length of Merida's body. Merida wrapped three fingers around the bow string and pulled. Three arrows of light formed as she began to take aim. The golem raised its arms up to smash Hiccup when she fired.

The arrows of light flew at the golem, and in three golden flashes ripped through it's stone body. The golem's body crumbled on itself. Hiccup let out a breath in relief as the stones remained unmoving on the ground. Merida sauntered up to him proudly. Smiling in pride and satisfaction.

"You're welcome E-rank," she said smugly. With that she began to stroll along back to the village to let the people know their quarry was now safe for use. Hiccup sighed and followed after.

* * *

><p>Hours later they were back at school. Hiccup reported to North as the girls took the rest of the day off.<p>

"That was kind of mean Merida," Rapunzel said to her partner as they got ready for bed.

"What was?" Merida asked, feigning innocence.

"What you did to Hiccup. He could've been hurt," Rapunzel elaborated.

"He's a knight Punz. Comes with the job," Merida said unconcerned. Rapunzel gave her a stern stare. Merida ignored it as she turned her attention to her textbook. Rapunzel sighed and shook her head.

* * *

><p>"Ha! Nice," Jack said the next day as the trio recounted their latest quest. Jack was completely unconcerned about Hiccup's well being(he knew his friend was more than capable of defending himself). He only laughed, saying how he'd done the same thing to Hiccup in the past, and that was why Hiccup didn't like doing quests with him anymore.<p>

"Oh yeah. Pain. Mutilation. Death. Haha, soooo funny," Hiccup said sarcastically.

"Well I for one am glad you are unhurt Hiccup," Elsa stated truthfully. She immediately blushed at her blatant admission and looked away as Hiccup smiled at her in thanks.

"I am too! I told Merida it wasn't funny!" Rapunzel chimed in quickly.

"At least I know who my real friends are," Hiccup said with a frown and a few dirty looks.

"Awww. Wee lamb," Merida teased mockingly. They ate breakfast before going to classes. At her locker and on a whim she checked her Speculum and thought about herself and Rapunzel. She blinked in surprise as she saw her information. Specifically their ranking.

"Punz! We're B-ranks now!" Merida declared happily.

"Really?" Rapunzel said in surprise as she took a look at the mirror. She gasped before smiling in pride and happiness. She and Merida high fived and gave a cheer. They concluded it must have been due to going on quests with Hiccup. Either way they were happy and proud of themselves. Soon enough they were sure they'd be A-ranked.

Merida continued to smile to herself as she pulled out a textbook. And she was about to turn around someone bumped into her rather roughly. She dropped her book in surprise and staggered to the side.

"Watch it," came a sharp voice. Merida looked over to see Astrid walking away. Her Dragon was on her shoulder, glancing back at them with spines on its tail raised.

Merida frowned after her before picking up her book and heading to class. Similar occurrences kept happening throughout the day. With Astrid seemingly bumping into Merida at any given moment, catching her by surprise and nearly making her topple over. The only thing holding her back from outright attacking her was Rapunzel calming her down.

Astrid's sudden strange behavior didn't go unnoticed however. As the day came to an end and she was putting away her books she was approached from behind.

"What are you doing?"

Astrid paused momentarily before putting her books away and shutting her locker. Hiccup stood behind her, Toothless on his shoulder, cocking his head inquisitively at her. Stormfly gave Hiccup a squawk in greeting, one her master didn't copy.

"No idea what you mean," Astrid replied casually as she shrugged an arm.

"You're trying to pick a fight with Merida and Rapunzel," Hiccup stated.

"Am I? That doesn't sound like me. I don't _try _pick fights," Astrid said in her defense. She narrowed her eyes at him. "If I want to fight someone, I do."

"Well cut it out," Hiccup told her.

"Why? We're all knights here. I have a right to challenge anyone I want."

"You know I wouldn't let you do that." Astrid glared at him. Hiccup let out a breath and took a step back, all while looking her in the eye. "Cut it out Astrid. Don't make me order you," he told her before walking away.

Astrid stared after him. Well he hadn't technically ordered her to stop. More like heavily suggested she do so. She smirked to herself as she reached up and stroked stormfly.

The next day Rapunzel smiled to herself as she and Merida made their way to the mess hall. In her hands were a plate of cupcakes she baked for Hiccup. She made sure to add a few more this time. She noticed Merida reaching a hand out. She quickly swatted her hand away.

"Hey!" Merida complained.

"These are not for you. You can have some if Hiccup says you can," she told her sternly.

"But I'm your best friend," Merida whined. "Shouldn't I have special rights to cupcakes?"

"You ate like five last night. If I don't stop you, you'd probably get fat," Rapunzel teased. Merida frowned and huffed as she crossed her arms over her chest and continued walking beside her. Rapunzel giggled at her childish behavior. As they went they passed Astrid and her friends. Merida took note of Astrid casting her eyes on them for a brief moment before her lips twitched upward into the faintest smirk. Snotlout said some kind of flirty remark at her side, causing her arm to shoot ot and hit him square in the face.

The timing couldn't have been worse as he staggered back and into Rapunzel, knocking over the tray of cupcakes and sending them all crashing to the floor.

"Not the cupcakes!" Rapunzel cried as she sank to her knees and mourned the loss of her hard work.

"Oh...uh, sorry," Snotlout said awkwardly. Rapunzel glanced up and shot him the death glares to end all death glares.

Meanwhile Merida stomped up to Astrid, getting right in her face with a snarl. "What is your problem Astrid?"

"I have no idea what you mean," Astrid said casually, but her smirk betrayed her act.

"You did that on purpose!" Merida cried insistently.

"It was an accident. Besides, no one is hurt. It's just a few cupcakes," Astrid said with a shrug. Merida's face started turning red in anger. But before she could continued a pair of hands pushed them apart.

"Ok. Easy now. No need to-"

"Revenge!" Rapunzel cried from the ground. She looked up at Astrid in anger and leapt to her feet. "We challenge you to a duel!" she cried aloud. Spectators passed and paused to gasp in shock.

"Start a fight," Hiccup said weakly.

"I accept," Astrid said in pride.

"And it just gets worse," Hiccup muttered with a sigh. Thus the arrangements were made. And surprisingly Astrid wanted o have the duel during physical education and combat class. Puzzling seeing as that was when Rapunzel's form was at it's strongest. But they accepted.

The school was buzzing with energy as the day passed before finally the duelists met in a large combat ring. Astrid stared down the girls with a smile, Stormfly furled and unfurled her wings anxiously.

Hiccup and the others stood back with the other students worried. Jack asked if Hiccup could stop the duel. Hiccup said he couldn't. Merida and Rapunzel had issued the challenge and it would bring dishonor to Astrid's clan if she backed down now. And as much as he didn't want his friends to get hurt he couldn't ask her to do that. So he stood back in resignation as Aster gave them the signal to begin.

Rapunzel took on her bow form in a golden flash of light. Merida had been surprised that the blonde had been the one to issue the challenge and not herself. But she was more than eager to fight the rude blonde.

Across from them Stormfly opened her wings, and then they began to expand. They grew so big they completely hid her form from view. The girls were reminded of the way Toothless assumed his shield form. They watched as the wings suddenly disappeared, or more accurately spread out to form the blades of of a double sided axe. Astrid carried her partner over her shoulder and smiled.

"Better get ready. I'm not going to go easy on you guys just because you're friends with Hiccup," Astrid called out.

Merida narrowed her eyes at her. "Wouldn't have it any other way." Without warning she raised her bow up and fired. It flew across the field in a flash of light, only to be deflected as Astrid knocked it away with the blade of her axe. Merida blinked in surprise. Astrid had better reflexes than she'd originally thought.

"This might get tough Punz. But if we can keep her back and away we'll have the advantage," Merida said softly.

_Longbow? _Rapunzel asked.

"Aye," Merida said with a nod. With a golden glow Rapunzel lengthened into her long bow form. Merida curled three fingers around the string and pulled back to form three arrows. Astrid arched a brow, slightly surprised at the new development. Then Merida fired. Astrid jerked

her body out of the way as the three arrows flew by in three golden flashes. She dodged them all entirely, or she thought she had. She saw a few strands of hair fall away to the ground. She frowned in annoyance before she began to rush them.

Merida stayed on the spot as she fired at her. But Astrid proved herself to be an evasive target. Twirling ducking and jerking out of the way of her arrows with amazing reflexes. What's more it was like she could read where the arrows were coming from before hand.

With a change of tactics Merida fired an arrow in front of her path, the arrow hit the ground and exploded, kicking up dirt and dust and temporarily blinding Astrid from her opponent. At the last second she managed to jerk her body out of the way as an arrow of light pierced the veil, managing to graze her arm and leave a line of singed skin. Merida kept up the assault, walking to the side as she fired arrow after arrow at her. Astrid leapt back, rolled, and dodged with amazing nimbleness.

But she knew if this kept up she'd lose. She'd get tired from all the running she was doing. She needed a change of tactics.

Astrid stood and jerked her head back to dodge an arrow. Merida paused in her assault to glare at her and smile.

Astrid narrowed her eyes. "Think you're winning red?"

"Seeing as how you've been running around like a deer...yeah. I'd say so," Merida called back tauntingly.

"Well let's see how you like being shot at!" Merida arched a brow as she held her axe out. "Wanna see what makes an A-rank?"

"Stormfly, change," Astrid said lowly. The wings acting as the blade of the axe expanded again, covering the entire axe. Merida watched, mostly out of curiosity, wondering what was going on.

Hiccup sighed. Merida and Rapunzel definitely had the advantage if they could keep it a long range vs short range battle. But unfortunately for them, while Stormfly's normal form was only suited to close range, her second form was good at either.

The wings finally unfurled and this time shorten, revealing Stormfly's second form. Merida stared curiously as Astrid held what now looked like a spiked lance, somewhat resembling Stormfly's tail. The spikes on the lance flexed, rising and falling before standing on end. Astrid smiled as she swung it in their direction.

Merida quickly raised her bow and fired four arrows in quick succession, knocking the four yellow spikes that had launched from the lance and at them. She looked to see more grow on the lance to replace them.

"Shall we see who's the better shot?" Astrid challenged. Merida narrowed her eyes as Astrid tensed and she pull on her bow string. Spikes and arrows flew across the space between them in quick succession, sometimes colliding in midair. Merida narrowed her eyes, concentration on dodging, and firing back. All the while Astrid was keeping the pressure on, getting steadily and steadily closer.

With a growl Merida instead pointed upward and fired an arrow. Astrid looked up and stared after it, watching the arrow disappear into the sun. But as she'd seen before numerous arrows began raining down from the sky. Astrid grabbed stormfly firmly by the long handle and began spinning her above her head. She managed to defend herself against most of the barrage, but some of the arrows made it through, grazing parts of her body. But she ignored the pain, knowing that as long as she didn't take a serious wound she could still win.

She heard Stormfly growl in warning, and as the rain of arrows ended she twisted her body to take an arrow to the arm. She dropped to a knew, placing a hand over the blistering and burnt mark on her upper arm to glare at Merida. As Merida pulled back on the string rose up and swung her lance, sending a small flurry of spikes at her. Merida rolled out of the way and looked back to Astrid to find her gone.

_Above us! _Rapunzel warned. Merida looked up as Astrid came down, lance poised above her head to strike. Merid leapt out of the way as Astrid brought her weapon down, smashing into the ground where she'd been standing a moment before before taking a horizontal swing at her.

Merida held up Rapunzel vertically to block. Thus a close range battle began between them. Merida tried to retreat and gain distance, but Astrid made sure to stay with her, unwilling to let her get far enough away to fire off a shot.

Rapunzel hissed in pain repeatedly as she was used to block the spiked lance, feeling as if she were being pricked every time the weapon collided with her. She prepared for the next attack as Astrid raised her weapon above her head, prompting Merida to prepare for the next attack as she held Rapunzel up to block it. But this time, while Rapunzel's form did block most of the lance the upper half suddenly bent and curled around her.

_Look out! _she shouted into her partners mind. Merida saw it and quickly jerked back, but not before recieving a shallow cut across her face. She retreated, and to her surprise Astrid didn't follow. Merida rubbed at her bleeding wound and hissed.

I'll get it, Rapunzel said to her. Sure enough she felt the wound close up.

"Looks like it's noon now," Astrid said as she pointed upward. Merida glanced up as well, finding the sun at it's highest position. "Might as well use that trump card of yours."

Merida narrowed her eyes and pulled back on her bowstring. Rapunzel's from started to glow brighter and brighter as she began to take in energy. The arrow of light forming began to get bigger and bigger as they prepared to unleash their strongest attack.

Astrid remained on the spot, waiting as the duo charged their attack. She wasn't worried. Not in the least. They'd already lost. She just didn't know it yet.

As the arrow was ready to fire Merida took aim and prepared to let it loose. Only for her vision to begin to blur. She shook her head and blinked, but it did nothing as it only seemed to get worse. She

suddenly wobbled on her feet, limbs beginning to get heavy.

_Merida? _Rapunzel asked in concern.

"I'm fine," Merida muttered as she shook her head, telling herself to focus. With a breath she looked back at Astrid, only to find her vision completely fuzzy, the other girl a blob of color. She tired to aim at her and fired.

Everyone watched as the arrow of sunlight flew across the field and at their opponent.

Only for everyone to be stunned as it veered off course, missing her completely. The arrow collided with the barriers, this time able to contain and disperse the magic, making it dissapear into golden fleck of light that drifted down to the ground.

Astrid smirked and began walking toward Merida as the red head fell to a knee, suddenly unable to stand on her own feet.

_Merida, what's wrong? _Rapunzel asked in worry. Merida didn't respond. She didn't know. She felt weak, her body was heavy, her vision swimming, and she couldn't get on her feet. Merida looked up, only to find a blobby mass of color standing before her.

Astrid stood victoriously over her opponent. Unbeknownst to her, she'd been poisoned. Stormfly's blade and spikes were covered in venom. Even a scratch could be enough to cripple an opponent.

"Give up?" she asked.

Merida looked up, eyes defiant despite her inablity to see her opponent. "Never."

Astrid smiled, impressed by her attitude. She could respect her tenacity. She'd beat her like a warrior. She cocked back her arm, grabbing Stormfly with both hands. Stormfly made her spikes stand on end in preparation. Then she swung. Merida heard the weapon whistle through the air and tensed herself for pain.

But before Astrid could connect there was a golden flash of flight. She was temporarily blinded by it, but felt her weapon connect, having had too much momentum to stop. Whatever she'd hit was sent flying, sailing across the field before rolling out of bounds and winning her the duel. She rubbed her eyes and blinked, looking in the direction she'd hit it to see what had happened.

Merida groaned, world still blurry and head spinning from being sent flying and then colliding with the ground. She was going to be sore and bruised later. But any thoughts on herself her cut short as she realized a warm body on top of hers. She heard a pained whimper and recognized it as Rapunzel's.

"Rapunzel?" Merida asked as she began feeling around with her hands, fingers finding Rapunzel's mass of hair and confirming it was her.

"I'm ok," Rapunzel said shakily. Merida wasn't fully convinced as she ran her hands down her body, eventually coming to her friends back. Her fingers stopped as they became covered in something wet and

warm.

Across Rapunzel backs were many scratches caused by Stormfly's spikes. Blood was flowing freely out of them and Merida's stomach dropped as she realized her friend had used herself as a shield. Aster rushed over to them, observing the damage to Rapunzel's back and quickly shrugging off his jacket to press it againt her wounds. Then he picked her up as gently as he could before taking her to the infirmary, but not before calling for someone to help Merida, who still couldn't see.

Merida sat where she was, world still imperceptible until she felt a hand on her shoulder. "Come on Merida," she heard Hiccup say before he picked her up. She leaned on him, clutching on his arm tightly as he led her to the infirmiry, but all the while she kept asking about Rapunzel, if what she'd felt was as bad as she was picturing in her mind. Hiccup remained silent before telling her she'd be ok.

He cast a glare back at Astrid who stood there as Stormfly resumed her normal form. She was unrepentant, smiling in victory as the rest of the Berk teens cheered her on, joined in by some of the other student.

All through the walk to the infirmiry Merida was surprisingly silent. Hiccup felt awkward being near her with her not frowning and making jab at his rank by constantly calling him by it.

Merida only stared straight ahead, still unable to see and limbs unresponsive and heavy. She swallowed, worry for her friend washing through her, making her stomach churn.

"We lost," she said quietly.

Hiccup let out a breath and looked into her face, unable to read her emotions. In the end there wasn't anything to say.

"Yeah."

* * *

><p>new chap. Sorry for the delay

11. Chapter 11

Bouncing Back

"Merida I'm fine, really," Rapunzel insisted as her worried friend ran her fingers over her back. "You know I heal quickly. It didn't even leave a scar," Rapunzel added to try and put her mind at ease.

Merida didn't say anything as she continued to scan her eyes over the fair skin of Rapunzel's back. It was hours after their duel with Astrid. Rapunzel had been taken to the infirmary to get her wounds treated and to deal with the venom from Stormfly's spines. Merida could only sit there, blind as people shuffled about to help her partner. She'd felt so helpless and afraid for her.

Luckily Hiccup was there. He quickly told the nurses all they'd need

to make an antidote for the venom and provided Merida with what company he could, assuring her that Rapunzel would be fine. Eventually the venom's effects began to wear off, as Merida slowly regained full control of her body. Even her vision returned.

Following suite once the venom was treated for Rapunzel and she could properly focus, she used her magic to heal herself. The scars along her back disappeared as if they were never there. And she sat up, smiling as if nothing had ever happened.

Merida had rushed to her and threw her arms around her. Rapunzel smiled and hugged her back, assuring her that she was fine. They were dismissed by Aster, told to take the rest of the day to recuperate. They went to their rooms where Merida asked to look at Rapunzel's back to see that she'd healed properly.

"See. Totally fine," Rapunzel said as she lowered her shirt.

"Why'd you do that?" Merida demanded.

"Do what?"

"Take that last hit for me," Merida said sharply. "You're aren't supposed to do that. I'm the Knight. I'm the one who fights."

"We fight _together_ Merida," Rapunzel pointed out. "We're a team."

"But you're supposed to be the weapon Rapunzel. You're not supposed to do that," Merida insisted. "If anyone is going to give blood in a battle, it's going to be from me."

"So I'm just supposed to sit back and let you get hurt?"

"Yes!" Merida cried angrily.

Rapunzel frowned. "I may be the Implement Merida. But I'm a Knight too. And you're my best friend. So I won't accept that," she said in defiance. Merida frowned in response. "You took me from my tower Merida. You showed me the world. You gave me a _real_ life," Rapunzel said, holding her gaze as she spoke.

"So if it ever comes to it, I'll gladly trade my life for yours." Merida's eyes widened at what she'd said. "It's the least I can do."

Merida stared at her. She knew that they'd each do all they could to protect one another. But she'd had no idea Rapunzel's devotion to her ran this deep. She wasn't sure how to respond to it.

Before she could think of anything else to say there was a knock at their door. Rapunzel quickly took her eyes off Merida's to go and open it. They were greeted by Elsa and Anna. The sisters asked if they were ok. Rapunzel gave them a chipper confirmation while Merida remained silent and brooding.

"You guys did pretty good. Astrid usually doesn't have to change Stormfly to her second form when fighting someone," Anna tried to say to make them feel better.

It didn't do much.

"Astrid is strong. She's a tough opponent to defeat. Something Anna and myself know first hand," Elsa said.

The girls perked up before looking to the sisters. "We've fought Astrid twice. We lost the first time, but won the second. Her skills in close quarters combat are quite unmatched. And the venom on Stormfly's blade and spines can stun or paralyze from even the slightest scratch. Also, as you witnessed yourself, Stormfly's lance form can bend and curl around defenses all on its own for a surprise attack," Elsa explained.

The girls' frowned at the mention of their opponent. "Well-uh-try not to get too down guys," Anna said. "You can't win them all, right?" she told them before ushering her sister and herself out of the room so they could be alone.

The girls sat in their room in silence, their first loss weighing heavily on them.

* * *

><p>Breakfast and lunch were tense and awkward the next day. While Rapunzel tried to make idle talk like things were normal, Merida was silent. It was obvious to all of them that their loss was weighing more heavily on the red head than her partner. They could practically see the dark cloud hanging over her head as she mechanically ate her food in silence.<p>

Unlike Rapunzel her partner was far more prideful.

So she wallowed, physically fine, but pride wounded.

The others weren't sure what to do or say that would help her.

Jack nudged Hiccup in the ribs with elbow. Hiccup looked to Jack, brows furrowed in confusion. What did he expect him to say? Jack motioned with his head to Merida. Telling him to say something, anything. Hiccup had always been better with words than him.

"So...guys," Hiccup said as he looked to Rapunzel and Merida. "Good job on your duel. You guys did well."

"Thank you Hiccup," Rapunzel said with a small smile.

"We lost," Merida mumbled with a scowl.

"Well...yeah. But-"

"But nothing!" Merida interrupted sharply. "She won and we lost. There's nothing more to it."

"Well I think if try to see it another way then-"

"See what another way?" Merida asked angrily. She immediately stood up and stormed off in a huff. The others watched her go, debating on whether or not they should follow or let her simmer on her own. They

settled on the latter.

Rapunzel stayed close by her friend and partner throughout the day, trying her best to just be there for her. She could partially understand how Merida felt. It didn't feel good to lose. And admittedly, after all they'd face they'd probably come to see themselves as unbeatable. But this only served as wake up call, letting them know they both still had much room for growth.

Unfortunately Merida was too busy feeling sorry for herself to see it that way.

What's worse was that Astrid was preening to herself, and the other Berkian teens, save Heather, kept shooting the two of them haughty glances. Rubbing their comrade's victory in, making sure salt stayed in the wounds.

Rapunzel hated seeing Merida so glum, but she had no idea what to do.

In the end, she didn't say anything. Eventually classes ended and the girls went back to their room. They studied and got ready for bed in silence. Merida turned pulled up her blankets and turned her back on her friend while Rapunzel looked on helplessly. In the end she let out a breath and closed her eyes, hoping Merida would come out of her funk on her own time.

* * *

><p>The next day Rapunzel woke up to find Merida missing. She panicked for a moment, believing the worst. But she settled don when she saw a note written in Merida's hand saying that she was going for a hike and would be back later.<p>

Merida walked the trail through the forest on the outskirts of the school. She just felt she needed to be alone. It was their off day anyway. She also couldn't bear the looks in all her friends' eyes. They looked at her like she were a wounded animal, pity for her all too apparent.

So she wanted to wallow for a bit? So what? Didn't she have that right?

She carried a small pack of provision on her back, a few of the items she still had from travelling around before coming to the academy. She aimed for nowhere in particular. But was experienced enough to know she could find her way back if neccessary. Her map and compass would make sure of that.

She walked a trail with overhanging branches, sunlight filtering through them before she stopped. She looked up at the sky. Gauging the time by the sun's relative position in the sky when something suddenly flew overhead in a black blur. Merida blinked, having sworn she'd caught of glimpse of something large and winged.

But whatever it was was gone. With her view obstructed by the trees around her she had no hopes of pinpointing it. With a sigh she continued on. She walked and walked, until her legs were tired. She slumped against a tree and drank some water from a canteen. She

closed her eyes, enjoying the warm day and the shade of the tree when she suddenly heard an explosion.

Merida leapt up, eyes scanning the treeline before noting the plume of smoke in the distance. Cocking her head to the side and curious she began to make her way toward it.

She eventually cleared the trees, coming upon a meadow with a small pond in it. She walked towards it while scanning the surrounding. She saw the black smoke was still further up ahead when a voice made her stop in her tracks.

"Merida?"

Merida turned her head, finally taking note of Hiccup sitting at the edge of the pond. A sketchbook in hand and Toothless curled up at his side. She frowned, his presence unwanted.

She turned her head without acknowledging him and continued to make her way towards the smoke.

But to her displeasure, he'd decided to follow her.

"Hey Merida. Surprised to see you out here," Hiccup said as he trailed behind her.

"Felt like going on a walk," she said back.

"Ah. Yeah a little fresh air is nice from time to time," Hiccup replied casually. "So where are you going?"

Merida stopped, glancing back and arching a brow. "Didn't you hear that explosion?"

Hiccup stiffened up. "Explosion? Nah. No explosions out here. I mean what could possibly explode in a forest?" he said as he gestured around them.

"That's what ah want to know," she said as he looked around. She scowled as the black smoke had dissipated, leaving her with no way of knowing where to keep going. She sighed before glancing back to look at Hiccup. Her eyes skimmed his form, taking note that he'd brought no provisions along. Only a small canteen.

"Where are your things E-rank?"

"What things?"

"A map? Compass? You know, basic survival tools?"

"Oh. Well dragons have a natural sense of direction," Hiccup said as he stroked his partner sitting on his shoulder. "He could point us back to the school with no problem."

Merida hummed before pressing her back aganinst a tree and crossing her arms over her chest. "No pack then? Or food?"

"Well I don't intend to be out here that long," Hiccup said.

"But we're miles from the school now. You might get too weak if you

don't eat anything," Merida told him. She took her pack off her back and began to rummage through it. She pulled out a few sticks of Jerky before offering him a piece. He accepted it before giving it a taste.

"It'll take hours for you to get back to school. You might collapse by then."

"Wouldn't take me as long as you'd think," Hiccup muttered under his breath.

"What?"

"Nothing."

Merida shrugged before sinking her teeth into her jerky and eating in silence.

"So how are you doing?" Merida looked up and arched a brow. "I mean are you ok? You seemed kind of depressed yesterday after...you know."

Merida frowned at him. "I don't want to talk about it."

"Ok," Hiccup said. "But," he added nervously. Merida looked at him. "I just wanted to say that I know losing sucks. Like a lot. But you can learn from it. There's always a greater lesson to be learned in loss than in victory," he told her. "Maybe now you know where you need to improve. Maybe you can think of new strategies in case you come across an opponent like Astrid again."

He'd hoped his words would make her see a silver lining and cheer her up. But he saw that probably didn't happen as she scowled at him.

"I don't need a lesson on loss from a coward who doesn't even fight," she told him vehemently.

"I'm just trying to help," Hiccup said.

"Fine. Then _help_ me understand," Merida began as she stood up. "How come you don't ever fight?"

"Why do you want to know so bad?" Hiccup challenged.

"I asked you first," Merida said insistently.

Hiccup sighed, managing not to roll his eyes. "I just don't see the point," he said with a shrug.

"Well do me a favor and don't go giving advice on loss when you won't even step into the ring and risk losing yourself. Telling me how I can 'learn' from it. Well what do you learn mister forfeits every time?" she spat at him.

"I have my reasons for not fighting," Hiccup said as his patience with her was beginning to wear thin. Toothless growled at her on his shoulder, not like her tone or the way she was hurling insults at his partner.

"Well what are they? Why are you even at this school? Do you not

fight because you don't have a proper weapon?" she pressed as she gestured to Toothless, remarking on his shield form. "Are you afraid you'll be great, become more popular with the ladies than you already are? Are you afraid of losing?"

"Me? Popular with women? What are you talking-"

"Or maybe you're just a coward!"

"I'm not a coward!" Hiccup cried. They glared at each other from a few feet away. Hiccup could just not understand how she turned his trying to help her into an argument. Then she had the gall to insult him!

He calmed himself, closing his eyes to take a few breaths. "Fine. You want to know? Well here it is," Hiccup said before opening his eyes and gazing into hers.

"I don't fight, because everyone is watching me," he revealed. Merida furrowed her brows in confusion. "You've heard of the border disputes between the Northern tribes and this kingdom, right?" Merida gave a slow nod. "Well as the future heir of one of the strongest tribes, I'm always being watched."

"Everyone is looking at me. Dissecting everything I do. Trying to determine if they should risk making friends with me, or start amassing an army. They want to see if I'm just a savage like everyone thinks all the other Northern tribes are. So that's why I don't fight," he finished.

"I'm just trying to get by. Fly under the radar and convince everyone that just maybe, we're not all war loving psychopaths. Which is difficult, seeing as our hard headed nature and 'personal honor' insist that we be the best at whatever we do. Including fighting. So now I'm trying to learn all I can about the politics of other kingdoms in hopes that I can make peace with at least some of them one day. Maybe even establish some trade as to make my people's lives better. All while trying to make sure my peers don't kill anyone, or piss off the wrong noble family and start a freaking war!"

At the end of his rant Hiccup was panting hard. He was red faced, hardly believing he'd spouted all of that to her. Merida on the other half was wide eyed. His words resonating with something inside of her. Dredging up memories.

For she knew what it was liked to be watched. To have everything she did scrutinized and judged.

She looked away in shame. All this time she'd misjudged him. All without ever really taking the time to get to know him. All she'd seen was his rank. And because of that she deemed that there was no way they could have anything in common.

"Do you have any idea how that feels?" Hiccup muttered quietly as he looked away.

"Actually...yes," Merida answered without thinking. Hiccup looked to her, scanning her face and finding traces of what looked like empathy.

Suddenly Merida swallowed and turned on her heel. "Well I'm going to go. Goodbye," she said as she began to walk away. Hiccup stared after her, stumped by her sudden change in demeanor. He cocked his head as she came to a stop a few feet away.

"Thank you," Merida said aloud, keeping her back turned toward him. Hiccup was surprised as she turned around. The faint traces of a grateful smile tugging at her lips. "Hiccup," she finished. With that she turned and left him standing there in stunned silence.

* * *

><p>Later in the day as the sun began to set Merida entered her shared room with Rapunzel. The blonde perked up, attention taken from her book as the redhead entered. And to her surprise, she was smiling.<p>

"Ah," Merida sighed as she dumped her pack on the floor and jumped onto her bed. She took a deep breath and released a relaxed sigh. "Much better."

"Everything ok Merida?" Rapunzel asked curiously.

"Aye Punz. Everything is grand," Merida said back. She craned her head to look at her friend. "Sorry I've been a little glum. It was totally unlike me," she apologized.

Rapunzel smiled back. "It's ok. Losing doesn't feel good."

"No. It doesn't. But it's no reason to act like a pouting child either. We should use this opportunity as a learning experience," Merida said with a firm nod, a glint of determination in her eye. "We obviously still have a ways to go. From what I gather, all A-ranks can change their weapons to at least one other form. So let's aim for that," Merida said.

Rapunzel smiled. "Sounds good."

"And when we do," Merida's smile widened. "We'll challenge Astrid to another duel. And next time...we'll take her down." Rapunzel held her smile and nodded in agreement. Glad to have her best friend back.

* * *

><p>The next school day Merida apologized to everyone for her gloomy attitude. All except Hiccup who was late to breakfast. Merida kept turning her head about in search of him. Wanting to apologize for the things she'd said.<p>

As she was looking down at her plate and eating her food a small blue figure suddenly began inching it's way towards the edge of her plate. Merida glanced up and gasped at the sight of Stormfly standing on the table before her, head cocking back and forth and releasing a hungry squawk.

"Stormfly." The dragon turned to the voice as Hiccup sat down in his usual spot. The small dragon walked over to him as he began setting food of his plate to the side for her.

"What's she doing here?" Rapunzel asked as she pointed to the

dragon.

"I've confiscated her from Astrid for a few days," Hiccup said with a shrug.

"I can't imagine she's happy about that," Jack said with a chuckle.

"Well she'll have to suck it up," Hiccup replied unconcerned.

Merida couldn't help but smile as she imagined Astrid's face twisted into a scowl as Hiccup took her partner away. But she made it go away before looking to Hiccup. "Hiccup," she said just loud enough to get his attention. Hiccup looked up at her and nodded for her to continue.

"I just wanted to say...well-I-" Merida stammered awkwardly. Apologies had never been her strong point.

"It's fine," Hiccup said with a shrug. Merida gave him a smile in thanks.

Hiccup may have been a mystery. He may have been snarky and a little annoying.

But maybe he wasn't such a bad guy.

* * *

><p>new chap

End
file.